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**A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE IN  
NEW JERSEY'S TEACHER EVALUATIONS: HOW PRINCIPALS MAKE  
MEANING OF THE DANIELSON FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING**

by  
Sara J. Van Ness

A Dissertation

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Services and Leadership  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at  
Rowan University  
February 23, 2016

Dissertation Chair: Ane Turner Johnson, Ph.D

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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my grandmother, Regina P. Tinello, who taught me to love learning and to pay that love forward.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my sincerest and deepest thanks to Dr. Ane Turner Johnson, my dissertation advisor, for all of her guidance and support throughout this journey. She has pushed me to become a better researcher, writer, and teacher. Her encouragement was invaluable when I doubted myself, and both her high expectations and her belief in my ability to succeed helped me to achieve what proved to be both the most challenging and rewarding accomplishment of my academic career. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Stephanie Abraham and Dr. Monica Kerrigan, for their helpful guidance, especially before entering the field. They helped me to remain flexible and truly embrace what it meant to be a qualitative researcher. In particular, Dr. Abraham's gracious agreement to talk through some of my methodological questions and her willingness to provide me with feedback on various drafts were invaluable.

I also would like to thank the Monmouth University Principals' Academy for allowing me to present my research to solicit participation from their members. I especially want to thank my participants for graciously agreeing to share both their documents and stories regarding their experiences in light of new teacher evaluation reforms. My students also deserve my thanks, lovingly referring to me as the soon-to-be "Doc Ness Monster" and listening as I expressed countless times that all writers, regardless of age, experience, or profession, must be committed to life-long learning.

Finally, I want to thank my parents and my husband for their understanding and unending support, especially when my confidence and energy were in low supply. I am truly blessed to have them in my life to not only help me be a better person each day, but to also remind me of what matters most.

## **Abstract**

Sara J. Van Ness

### **A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE IN NEW JERSEY'S TEACHER EVALUATIONS: HOW PRINCIPALS MAKE MEANING OF THE DANIELSON FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING**

2015-2016

Ane Turner Johnson, Ph.D.

Doctor of Education

In recent years, education in the United States has been framed within a context of crisis where American students have been perceived as unable to compete with their international peers in an increasingly competitive global environment. Some responses to this perceived crisis included reforms, which changed teacher evaluation policies. In New Jersey, the Teacher Effectiveness and Accountability for the Children of New Jersey (TeachNJ) Act mandated that districts use a state-approved model for evaluations, the most popular of which was the Danielson Framework for Teaching (FFT). The FFT has become an integral part of teacher evaluation reform, and this study examined this changing discourse through Fairclough's (2010) theory of the technologisation of discourse. As the instructional leaders of their buildings, principals played a key role in the discursive change process; therefore, this study also explored how principals functioned as social agents in enacting the discourse of change. The findings suggest that the Danielson Group's website represented the elements of technologisation, providing a strategy for change that supported and positively appraised neoliberal values such as objectivity and quantification. It also demonstrated that a principal's enactment of the discourse was unique to his past experiences and values, dialectically related to both his role as a social agent in the change and his appraisals of the reforms.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

American schools are in crisis. At least, this is perhaps what one would assume by listening to politicians, pundits, and the news media detail the failings of public education across the country (Gabbard & Atkinson, 2007; Giroux, 2010; Lathan, 2011). In a recent column for *The Washington Post*, Fareed Zakaria (2014) pointed to America's "educational failings" as "deeply troubling" and concluded that America's students' problem-solving abilities in the areas of literacy, numeracy, and technology were far inferior to others from similarly economically advantaged countries from around the world (n.p.). Zakaria's concerns have been echoed in a host of speeches, commercials, documentaries, exposés, and reports, which outline how American students are falling behind and offer negative portrayals of teachers and administrators, who are unable to prepare students to compete in an increasingly competitive global market (Edwards, 2014; Gabbard & Atkinson, 2007; Giroux, 2010; Koyama, 2014; Lathan, 2011; Lonsbury & Apple, 2012).

The rhetoric regarding the current crisis facing schools is actually not a new phenomenon and not even one that is limited to the United States (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Gilbert, 2011; Giroux, 2010; Lonsbury & Apple, 2012; Pini & Gorostiaga, 2008). Rather, crisis has provided a context for school reform movements for some time, and "these perspectives blame public schools for the declining of USA international competitiveness, rarely taking into account how social inequality impacts student learning" (Pini & Gorostiaga, 2008, p. 431). The oversimplification of the problem has spawned a variety of reactive responses. Cochran-Smith (2005) suggests that many school reform agendas

use strategies that “are intended to conjure hopeless situations that can be remedied only by pursuing radically different directions, a conclusion that neatly paves the way for the policy recommendations of their architects” (p. 183). That is, the context of crisis has helped to shift the power dynamics in schools across the country as more federal and state officials have increasingly more control with the implementation of new reforms (Gittell & McKenna, 1999; Kirst, 2004; Koppich & Esch, 2012; McGuinn, 2011).

Some have even suggested that the “crisis” facing America’s education system is not simply one that has harmful effects for students, but one that is perhaps negatively impacting educators in the field as well (Ball, 2003; Giroux, 2010; Larsen 2005; Lonsbury & Apple, 2012). Giroux (2010) uses the metaphor of a battlefield to describe a war on the public sector, which is “under attack” where teachers have become a “casualty” in a process that seeks to “dumb down” the profession (p. 347, 348, 365). Giroux (2010) further warns:

If left to proceed unchecked, reform will mean the advancement of a formative pedagogical culture that promotes political and cultural illiteracy while making teachers and students more receptive to the disempowering disciplinary practices of neoliberal policies, values, and social relations. (p. 345)

The present changes have emerged out of and produced conflict and crisis, which is reflected in the rhetoric on both sides of the debate.

Neoliberal ideology has become increasingly influential in educational policy and reform over the past 40 years, starting in part with the 1971 publication of the Powell Memorandum entitled “The Attack on the American Free Enterprise System” and the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* (Gabbard & Atkinson, 2007; Spillane & Kenney,

2012). These two events became important in framing American education in terms of crisis, thereby promoting strategies for change that were based on neoliberal ideology. This trend has continued to the present day. Neoliberalism is the belief that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). It represents the resurgence in the belief that schools will benefit from policy reform, which includes less governmental control and spending and more influence from the free market and private sector (Gabbard & Atkinson, 2007; Giroux, 2010; Larsen, 2005; Lonsbury & Apple, 2012; Tienken, 2013).

More recently, an economic recession, increased unemployment, and the housing crisis in the United States have made many people more conscious about how education correlates with economic interests. Students and their families have been transformed into “consumers” of their education within a global economy (Gabbard & Atkinson, 2007; Gilbert, 2011; Giroux, 2010; Larsen, 2005; Lonsbury & Apple, 2012; Tienken, 2013). As a result, some argue that education has been increasingly redefined by values, which emphasize accountability, quality control, standards, and performance, and this has led to reform initiatives and policy changes in an increasingly neoliberal landscape (Gabbard & Atkinson, 2007; Gilbert, 2011; Giroux, 2010; Larsen, 2005; Lonsbury & Apple, 2012; Spillane & Kenney, 2012; Tienken, 2013). In the years to come, it will be even more important for scholars to examine how neoliberal ideology will continue to impact the way we understand and re-value education through a framework that often quantifies the quality of students’ and educators’ work.



## **Neoliberalism, Marketization, and Changing Teacher Evaluation Policies**

Many neoliberal education reform initiatives, in both the United States and abroad, have focused on improving teacher quality through new teacher evaluation policies (Gilbert, 2011; Lathan, 2011; Pini & Gorostiaga, 2008). These policy changes have led to the dismantling of critical pedagogical practices in schools through a “militarized form of market fundamentalism” (Giroux, 2010, p. 342). That is, teachers, and by extension, their students have been encouraged not to question the standards, which have arguably oversimplified teaching and learning to a prescriptive set of methods (Ball, 2003; Giroux, 2010). Lathan (2011) suggests that in today’s economy-focused society, neoliberal economic globalization seems to be the driving force behind many reform initiatives: “In many public schools today, like in the early twentieth century, democratic ideals are often secondary to the more dominant ideals of the economy” (p. 135). Gilbert (2011) similarly notes that the current national and global policy landscape is characterized by a “narrow economic and technicist priorities which currently dominate national and international policy making” (p. 4). Neoliberal ideology is both explicitly and implicitly embedded among much of the policy language and associated tools used in reform movements, including those in education (Ball, 2003; Carusi, 2011; Fairclough, 2010; Gabbard & Atkinson, 2007; Tienken, 2013).

In the United States, the Obama administration has continued the trend of increased federal involvement in education reform efforts targeted at teacher quality and effectiveness, which began with the Bush administration’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB) program and the requirement for all teachers to become “highly qualified” (Koppich & Esch, 2012; Lonsbury & Apple, 2012; McGuinn, 2012). The Race to the Top Fund

(RTTT) has likewise carried on NCLB's tradition of emphasizing the position of America's schools in a global market. NCLB sought to make "the ideal of equal opportunity" where "a reality, a global economic competitiveness will be restored as human capital production in schools is brought into precise alignment with the needs of business and industry" (Lonsbury & Apple, 2012, p. 760).

Today, the emphasis on competition is central to RTTT, which is even suggested in the program's title (Giroux, 2010). RTTT awards funding to states that follow four main objectives, one of which impacts teacher evaluation reform. RTTT requires states to (a) adopt standards that will create college and career-ready students, (b) develop data-collection systems to track student progress to inform future practice, (c) hire, retain, and train the best teachers, especially in high-need districts, and (d) repair failing school districts (United States Department of Education [USDOE], 2014). As Fowler (2013) notes, "educators are not necessarily enthusiastic about new laws and rules from Washington or their state capital. The success of implementation depends on motivating educators to implement the new policy and providing them with the resources to do so" (p. 18). This is certainly apparent with RTTT because it impacts teacher evaluation, fundamentally changes power structures, and it is a topic that has long been ignored in terms of national education reform (McGuinn, 2012).

One such change among power structures is the increased influence of governors and other state and federal officials in shaping education policy (Henig, 2009; Gittell & McKenna, 1999; Kirst, 2004; McGuinn, 2011; Mokher, 2010; Shober, 2012). RTTT helps to centralize power through standardization and indirectly gives more authority to state officials, who have used it as a springboard for their reform agendas (McGuinn,

2012). States cannot even be eligible to apply for funding through RTTT if they have any policies in place that would prevent student test scores from being linked to teacher evaluations (McGuinn, 2012). That is, the RTTT program uses funding or lack thereof in order to ensure states reform teacher evaluation policies. However, some research suggests that new evaluations and reform movements, which focus on tying student tests scores and other accountability measures to teacher evaluations, may carry a variety of unintended, negative consequences (Ball, 2003; Giroux, 2010; Larsen 2005; Lonsbury & Apple, 2012). Teachers, who are being held increasingly accountable for students' scores, are unable to control for the many factors outside of the classroom, including poverty and crime, which may impact their students' abilities to succeed on standardized assessments (Lonsbury & Apple, 2012).

Larsen (2005), citing the work of Neave (1998), explains that the political dialogue surrounding teacher evaluation reform initiatives suggests a “new Evaluative State,” which includes “formal assessment procedures as a mode of control while appearing to devolve power to individuals and autonomous institutions” (p. 300). Although it seems as though teachers achieve more power in the evaluation process through what appear to be collaborative evaluation models, more power is actually concentrated at the state and federal level through the new standardization measures, which have been influenced by private sector interests. During the 1980s in response to the publication of *A Nation At Risk*, education reform efforts were focused on promoting the “teacher quality agenda” and were often financially supported by business interests (Koppich & Esch, 2012, p. 82). The motivation for these businesses to become involved and actually shape education policy was the widespread belief that better schools and

better teachers would help to prepare students to eventually become better employees, thereby strengthening a struggling US economy in a competitive global market.

Koppich and Esch (2012) argue that we are seeing something similar today because the US economy is once again struggling; however, they also point out that the tone has changed within these reform efforts to one that is much more caustic: “the call for ‘teacher professionalism’ has fallen out of favor and in its place is the ‘get rid of the bad ones’ fervor” (p. 91). Increasingly, businesses, philanthropic groups, and other outside agencies have a powerful stake in supporting education reform initiatives that are originating with the federal government while unions and the teachers, who are represented by them, have arguably lost a considerable amount of power (Carusi, 2011; Edwards, 2014; Koyama & Varenne, 2012; Lathan, 2011; McGuinn, 2011; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). The Obama administration has embraced philanthropic involvement in education reform initiatives, even creating the position of Director of Philanthropic Engagement within the Department of Education (Koppich & Esch, 2012). This interest has led to a trickledown effect and widespread reform, particularly with regard to teacher preparation, retention, and evaluation. Many states are adopting policies to follow suit. Foundations like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have donated millions toward education reform initiatives, which “stress the high correlation of the quality (or effectiveness) of teaching and levels of student achievement and highlight the stagnant performance of American students on international tests” (Koppich & Esch, 2012, p. 90).

The Obama Administration’s RTTT program has also had an unprecedented impact on the relationship between the Democratic Party and the major teachers’ unions in the United States, and McGuinn (2012) suggests that it may even represent one of the

most significant long-term effects of the policy. Both the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) have publically acknowledged the need to modify or reform teacher evaluation systems (McGuinn, 2012). However, these initiatives aimed at reforming teacher tenure and evaluation policies have also been met with considerable resistance from unions through demonstrations of solidarity against the related proposed changes to tenure reform and elimination of collective bargaining rights. In Madison, Wisconsin, teachers called for a “sick out,” where a large portion of the teachers called out for a sick day to oppose legislation to eliminate collective bargaining, and teachers in Detroit, Michigan organized sit-ins and a march to protest the closures of schools that were labeled as failing (Lathan, 2011).

Many are critical of union pushback, and some of the most cited complaints with regard to the power exerted by teachers’ unions include the use of due process for dismissal, job security and compensation based on seniority, and resistance to merit-based pay programs (Jacoby, 2010). Research suggests that reform must be a collaborative effort, involving teachers in not only the evaluation process, but also in defining the values underlying what those evaluations are measuring (Jacoby, 2011; Larsen, 2005). Some argue that teacher evaluation reform must focus on the continued growth of educators rather than simply punitive measures, and teachers and their unions should be included in the research process, which ultimately impacts both contract negotiations and policy changes (Chelsey, 2011; Jacoby, 2011).

Administrators and policy makers alike must work to build educational environments that center around trust, professionalism, and respect rather than fear and

mistrust (Jacoby, 2011). However, more often than not, reform initiatives, including those that target teacher evaluation, originate from outside of local school governance structures (Finn & Petrilli, 2013). Within the context of our society where economic globalization, competition, and standardized test scores are the guiding forces behind many educational policies, it is imperative that we better understand how the policies from the state and local level are developed, perceived, and operationalized at the school level.

### **Rhetoric and Reform in New Jersey: The TeachNJ Act**

In recent years, and particularly since the RTTT initiative, state agencies across the country have gained more power in influencing district-level initiatives, and New Jersey is no exception (Henig, 2009; McGuinn, 2011; McGuinn, 2012; Mokher, 2010; Shober, 2012). Governor Chris Christie, a staunch advocate for a free-market system approach to education reform, which is grounded in neoliberal ideologies, has led the way in New Jersey to sweeping changes to many education policies (Tienken, 2013). One of the most radical policy changes comes from the inception of the Teacher Effectiveness and Accountability for the Children of New Jersey (TeachNJ) Act, which fundamentally changes teacher evaluations and teacher tenure by requiring districts to use one of the state-approved evaluation models, each of which purports to use objective, data-driven measures. In the 2011 State of the State Address, Christie promised to undertake what he explained to be a crucial policy issue facing the state, the need for teacher tenure reform. He explained, “I am committed to improving the measurement and evaluation of teachers, and I have an expert task force of teachers, principals, and administrators working on that issue right now.... Let New Jersey lead the way again. The time to

eliminate teacher tenure is now” (Christie, 2011). In addition to pointing to statistics related to underperforming school districts, Christie emphasized his neoliberal philosophy, stressing that we must “end the myth that more money equals better achievement” and pointing to how failing schools are “wasting our children’s time or the public’s money” (Christie, 2011). While speaking at Princeton University, New Jersey Education Commissioner Christopher Cerf reinforced Christie’s position on teacher tenure and evaluation, explaining that the governor had a “longstanding position that the tenure system is broken” (Hu, 2011).

A month later, the Christie administration unveiled their plan to reform tenure policies by overhauling the teacher evaluation system through the TeachNJ Act. Teacher evaluations would now be linked to student test scores in addition to the traditional observations conducted in the past. TeachNJ proposed modifications to teacher evaluations, mentoring, tenure decisions and revocation, and tenure hearings and arbitration (New Jersey Department of Education [NJDOE], 2012). In August 2012, the TeachNJ Act was passed, and by September 2013, the State Board of Education approved Achieve New Jersey (AchieveNJ), guidelines for effectively implementing the requirements set out by the TeachNJ Act (NJDOE, 2012, 2014a). The law sought to provide individualized feedback to teachers and other educators so that they could develop their skills while remaining focused on student achievement, rewarding those teachers who were deemed effective and providing support or eliminating teachers, who were identified as ineffective (NJDOE, 2012).

Unlike in the past where a teacher could achieve tenure after three years of positive evaluations via classroom observations, the TeachNJ Act reformed the decision-

making process for tenure to evaluate educators based on measures of student achievement and growth. AchieveNJ outlined the multiple measures of the new teacher evaluation system to include measures of student achievement in addition to classroom observations. In collaboration with their principals, teachers would now develop Student Growth Objectives (SGOs) in order to measure students' progress over time. Teachers, who taught language arts or mathematics in grades 4 through 8, were also evaluated based on improvements in their students' New Jersey's Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) scores, student growth percentiles (SGPs), from one year to the next (NJDOE, 2014a). SGOs and/or SGPs comprised a percentage of each teacher's summative evaluation each year.

Under TeachNJ, tenure decisions were now based on evaluations, which were comprised of multiple classroom observations for both tenured and non-tenured teachers. Non-tenured teachers were now eligible for tenure after four consecutive years, achieving ratings of Effective or Highly Effective on a standardized four-point scale during at least two of their last three non-tenured years (NJDOE, 2012). Teachers who already achieved tenure could more easily have their tenure revoked if they had consecutive years where they were rated as Partially Ineffective or Ineffective. Any teacher who was rated Partially Ineffective or Ineffective had to collaboratively develop a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) with his or her supervisor in order to attempt to remediate the identified areas in need of improvement (NJDOE, 2012). TeachNJ also reformed the procedures for tenure hearings and the revocation process, making them shorter and more cost-effective.

These changes to teacher evaluation reform marked a drastic change to the policies that often helped to guarantee job security for teachers. New Jersey was the first



state to enact a tenure statute in 1909, and the TeachNJ Act now changed this long-held tradition (Chesley, 2011). In his 2011 State of the State Address, Christie suggested that the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA), the state's largest and most powerful union for public workers, had in some way become unusually empowered and emboldened in protecting ineffective teachers. He planned to shift power away from the union, noting that "the most important step in that process [teacher evaluation reform] is to give schools more power to remove underperforming teachers.... Teaching can no longer be the only profession where you have no rewards for excellence and no consequences for failure to perform" (Christie, 2011, par. 221-223.). Christie seemed to suggest that the changes to teacher evaluations and tenure reform helped schools to hold more local control.

The collaborative creation of SGOs or the opportunity for teachers to participate in the School Improvement Panel (ScIP) certainly appeared to relinquish power to the schools. However, one may also argue that the TeachNJ Act and associated changes to teacher evaluations also took some of the power away from teachers and the union that represents them, concentrating it instead at the state level. In accordance with the TeachNJ Act, the ScIP was responsible for "ensuring the effectiveness of the school's teachers by overseeing mentoring activities, conducting evaluations, identifying professional development opportunities, and conducting a mid-year evaluation of any teacher rated Ineffective or Partially Effective in the most recent annual summative evaluation" (NJDOE, 2012, p. 3). Each ScIP had to include participation from the principal, the vice principal, and a teacher; however, the teacher's role was limited as he or she had to first be deemed "suitable" to participate through approval from the majority

representative. The teacher would also not participate in evaluations without additional approval (NJDOE, 2012). In addition, TeachNJ created the Educator Effectiveness Task Force and Regional Achievement Centers (RACs), which further helped to support the top-down implementation of teacher evaluation reform and represent increased authority at the state level (McGuinn, 2012).

Ball (2003) notes that what may be characterized as a movement toward deregulation in education initiatives is actually a form of “re-regulation” where seemingly objective measures for improvement and growth are not only changing the process, but the people as well (p. 217). That is, the mode of regulation and control is less visible and instead is based on systems of self-regulation and competitive performativity for teachers, and by extension, building-level leaders like principals, who must emerge as “neo-liberal professionals” in light of the new reforms (Ball, 2003, p. 217).

### **The Principal’s Role in Navigating and Operationalizing New Policy**

Even though principals may have less control on what policies come from state and federal officials, research shows that they are very influential in how those policies are shaped within their schools (Honig, 2004; Ingle, Rutledge, & Bishop, 2011; Koyama, 2014; Louis & Robinson, 2012; Rutledge, Harris, & Ingle, 2010; Spillane et al., 2002). Because the policy language from the state or federal government is often ambiguous, the principal’s role becomes vital in the meaning making process with these mandates. As Louis and Robinson (2012) explain, “Policies themselves comprise complex ideas that are often ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations. How educators understand a given policy will depend on the constructs, schema, values, and emotional reactions they bring to the policy content” (p. 631). Policies related to teacher evaluation and measures

of teacher quality are certainly no exception. In fact, Cochran-Smith (2005) points to the lack of consensus and clarity among policies that address “teacher quality.” Similarly, Koppich and Esch (2012) identify this as a major flaw in teacher evaluation reform initiatives because “at the nub of the problem is the lack of a widely accepted, credible, and valid definition of what teacher effectiveness is or looks like” (p. 89). With so much that depends on the principal’s interaction with the discourse, it is essential that we understand how principals navigate the changing policy landscape.

The highly dynamic nature of education reform movements creates a work environment “where means and ends are not always clear” (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 733). Both the institutional and political context in which the instructional leader works necessarily impacts his or her understanding of policy. Principals play a key role in school governance with regard to policy implementation because they serve as mediators between school staff and central office, who often hand down these ambiguous or abstract policy directives, forcing principals to make meaning of them before putting them into practice (Ingle et al., 2011). It can even be argued that the unclear nature of policy language translates into principals using similarly unclear or ambiguous directives:

Even in public, principals, other administrators, and district leaders may utilize symbolic language, which is ambiguous, metaphorical, and open to multiple interpretations. Ill-defined terms, such as *accountability* and *transparency*, are employed to garner support for high-stakes testing, a cornerstone of NCLB accountability. (Koyama, 2014, p. 284)

Although Koyama (2014) focuses here on some of the central tenants for NCLB, the same holds true within the current national context of RTTT and more locally in response

to New Jersey's TeachNJ Act. In an era of accountability, documents produced for and by school districts in response to the TeachNJ Act represent signifiers of compliance that are informed by the changing policy environment, and principals play a pivotal role in this process. As Ball (2003) rightly notes, "symbolism is as important as substance" (p. 226). It is essential that we understand how principals make meaning of these texts by examining both the documents associated with the changes and by exploring the symbolic language that they use to describe the changing landscape of teacher evaluation in New Jersey.

### **Problem Statement**

When a perceived crisis sparks a disruption of the status quo, it is necessary to examine the strategies for change intended to ameliorate the given problems "because strategies have a strongly discursive character: they include imaginaries for change and for new practices and systems, and they include discourse, narratives and arguments which interpret, explain and justify the area of social life they are focused upon ..." (Fairclough, 2010, p. 18). Political leaders from both the state and federal levels have seemed to answer the call to address the present crisis of public education, proposing a slew of initiatives and policy changes, and New Jersey is no exception. New Jersey teacher evaluation reform has been characterized as a strategy for change to address the crisis facing the state, perhaps most notably by New Jersey's governor Chris Christie. The Christie administration led the way toward sweeping reforms to both teacher evaluation and the tenure system through the enactment of the TeachNJ Act in 2011.

Cochran-Smith (2005) argues "understanding the rhetoric of reform, then, is central to deconstructing the politics of teacher education" (p. 183). That is, this same

concept provides a rationale for further exploring the new teacher evaluation policies in New Jersey. The recent implementation of TeachNJ in New Jersey represents yet another facet of the much broader push toward greater accountability in schools. Changes to teacher evaluation are currently in their first years of implementation across the state, and it will likely remain unclear for some time just how these new policies will impact teachers and the collective profession in the future. Spillane et al. (2002) note, “Most research on accountability has focused on the effects of these initiatives on student achievement and, to a lesser extent, their influence on classroom instruction. Ironically, the role of school principals in implementing accountability-based policies has gone largely ignored” (p. 732). As leaders in their buildings, principals are not only subject to the influences of the greater context of changes to teacher quality and evaluation methods, but are also key contributors to the rhetoric within their school communities.

The present study focused on the discourse surrounding New Jersey’s new teacher evaluation models, which have emerged as a result of the state’s recently adopted TeachNJ Act. By analyzing Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching (FFT), one of the most widely used and approved teacher evaluation models under the TeachNJ guidelines, I sought to uncover the narrative implicit in the most popular version of teacher evaluation in New Jersey, the Danielson FFT, regarding teachers, the profession as a whole, and the values that this framework promoted. I also looked to more fully understand how instructional leaders, specifically principals, were conceptualizing and describing this evaluation model as a strategy for change within the broader context of neoliberal education reform.

## **Purpose of the Present Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how principals made meaning of the Danielson FFT. This research sought to analyze the principal's role in the greater discourse surrounding teacher evaluation reform in addition to examining how the principals' participation in the discourse existed in a liminal space between the texts produced outside of the school and district context (i.e., the Danielson FFT) and those that were used by principals within their schools. This study used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and specifically employed a dialectical-relational approach, in order to more fully understand how these documents were strategies for change. This study also took what Fairclough (2010) refers to as a transdisciplinary approach in order to explore the discourse surrounding teacher evaluation models through Helms Mills, Thurlow, and Mills' (2010) critical sensemaking theory and Fairclough's (2010) conception of the technologisation of discourse.

In addition to exploring the documents associated with the Danielson's FFT, I conducted interviews with a purposeful sample of principals, instructional leaders within their respective buildings, in order to better understand how they made meaning of the new evaluation. I also critically analyzed the material culture associated with the Danielson FFT that was used in each principal's respective school.

**Research questions.** This research was guided by the following essential questions, which were adapted from Fairclough's (2010) recommendations for CDA of strategies in response to crisis:

1. What strategies for change have emerged within the discourse of New Jersey's approved teacher evaluation models, and specifically, the Danielson FFT?

2. What are the origins of these strategies for change within the Danielson FFT?
3. How do principals function as “social agents” in promoting the discourse emergent from changes to New Jersey’s teacher evaluations?

**Key terms.** Terms, including “discourse,” “social agents,” and “strategies for change” provided the foundation for the central research questions of this project. As a result, it is imperative to understand both the denotative meanings for these terms and philosophical implications of using them in light of my chosen strategy of inquiry and approach. According to Fairclough (2010), discourse is not easily defined or bounded in terms of a single or isolated object of study. Rather, he notes, that “we cannot answer the question ‘what is discourse’ except in terms of both its ‘internal’ relations and its ‘external’ relations with such other ‘objects’” (p. 3). A text must be understood both within the context of its production and interpretation, that is, its use in practice, and within the greater sociocultural context. CDA is “*not* analysis of discourse ‘in itself’ as one might take it to be, but analysis of dialectical *relations between* discourse and other objects, elements, or moments, as well as analysis of the ‘internal relations’ of discourse” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 4).

The term “social agent” suggests that an individual both impacts and is impacted by the discourse in which he or she participates because “social practices ‘mediate’ the relationship between social structures at the most general and abstract level and particular, concrete social events” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 232). The word “agent” further suggests a duality. First, an agent may be defined as one, who is subject to these social forces, or one, who acts in accordance with or on behalf of another person, or in this case,

discourse. In addition, the term “agent” also suggests that the person has a degree of “agency” or willful ability to influence or impact the discourse at hand.

These social agents are dialectically related to strategies for change, which may emerge as a response to a perceived crisis. Strategies for change are “attempts, in the context of the failure of existing structures, to transform them in particular directions” with an ultimate goal that “seeks possibilities for transformation which can overcome or mitigate limits on human well-being” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 14.) The interaction between social agents, strategies, and the discourse surrounding it are highly complex: “Strategies for achieving changes of a particular sort are pursued in a more or less systematic and organized way by groups of social agents in different positions, with different interests or with different objectives” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 18). The present study addressed the interaction between discourse, strategies for change, and social agents within the context of New Jersey’s teacher evaluation reform.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This project was also guided by a two-part theoretical framework, which incorporated Fairclough’s (2010) conception of the technologisation of discourse and Helms Mills et al.’s (2010) critical sensemaking. The former was used to describe the greater context of the changes to both policy and practice as a result of the TeachNJ Act, while the latter was used to explore how the principals made meaning of the changes or disruptions to current practice (Weick, 2005). Each part of the theoretical framework is briefly described in the pages that follow.



**The technologisation of discourse.** Fairclough (2010) explains the technologisation of discourse as “a process of intervention in the sphere of discourse practices with the objective of constructing a new hegemony in the order of discourse of the institution or organization concerned...” (p. 137). The Danielson FFT, like other teacher evaluation models now being used across the state, represents the changing discourse, which now guides practice. Through this process, the technologisation of discourse is achieved through “redesigning existing discursive practices and training institutional personnel in the redesigned practices, on the basis of research into the existing discursive practices of the institution and their effectivity ...” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 137). Principals and other school administrators, responsible for evaluating teachers in their buildings, have been required to complete extensive training in order to operationalize the evaluation models. In New Jersey, districts are held responsible for the training of their evaluators in using their chosen state-approved teacher evaluation model in order to comply with the new policy standards (McGuinn, 2012). As a result, principals and other school leaders play a vital role in mediating the policies handed down from the state when implementing new evaluations with teachers in their buildings.

**Critical sensemaking.** Within the current context of education reform and the drastic changes to teacher evaluations in New Jersey and around the country, there is no shortage of ambiguity or uncertainty. Weick (1995) explains that sensemaking often occurs when people are presented with a crisis or event with uncertain or ambiguous outcomes. As a result, this study used what Helms Mills et al. (2010) define as critical sensemaking, which provided a framework for understanding how principals made meaning of the new teacher evaluation policies, and specifically the Danielson FFT.

Helms Mills et al. (2010) elaborate upon Weick's sensemaking framework, suggesting a way it may be operationalized into what they term "critical sensemaking."

Changes to New Jersey's teacher evaluations may be described as what Weick (1995) terms an "organizational shock," a change that prompted principals and other educational professionals to employ critical sensemaking in order to understand the new requirements. Helms Mills et al. (2010) suggest that critical sensemaking is particularly effective when used to better understand the processes by which people make meaning in response to crisis. Changes to New Jersey's teacher evaluations have been framed as a crisis, which may be understood in light of the greater technologisation of discourse at both the state and federal level.

### **Significance of the Study**

How we interact with documents, in their myriad forms, is a "reasonably under-researched area of social life" (Rapley, 2007, p. 87). Because it is important to understand the function of "documents-in-use" (Rapley, 2007, p. 88), particularly those in education, this study served to provide potential benefits for practitioners, policy makers, and the greater scholarly community. The selected methodology for this study, particularly the use of CDA as a guiding framework, were based on a philosophy that research should be used to not only describe or critically examine elements of discourse, but to also "address social wrongs in their discursive aspects and possible ways of righting or mitigating them" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 11).

**Implications for practice.** In terms of practice, this study provided potential benefits for principals in schools across the state. Principals serve as the instructional leaders of their buildings, and this research provided the opportunity for those involved to

reflect on their use of the Danielson FFT. In addition, the insight gained as a result of the study may have provided principals with the opportunity to better understand how they used teacher evaluation models in their discourse with teachers, evaluators, and central office administrators in implementing the state policy. Additionally, this research may have provided the foundation to begin further dialogue to discuss the complex and vital role that school principals play, which some argue has become even more vital to the collective health of an educational organization today than in years past (Fullan, 2009).

**Implications for current and future policy.** This study also had implications for policy, particularly with regard to evaluation of the current parameters of TeachNJ and the associated guidelines of AchieveNJ. The final stage in any policy making process is evaluation, where the effectiveness of a policy is assessed to decipher if the action plan has worked as it was intended to do so (Fowler, 2013). This study used CDA in order to explore Danielson's FFT, which was the most popular state-approved teacher evaluation model under the new policy guidelines of the TeachNJ Act. One of the integral aspects of any research employing CDA as an approach is the application of the knowledge gained as a result of the research (Fairclough, 2010). As such, the present study could have influence on current policy by providing guidance on how principals were putting the TeachNJ policy into practice through the use of Danielson's FFT. It may have also provided insight as to how districts, led by their principals, were tailoring the FFT to meet the specific needs of their districts' teaching staffs. In addition, it may have helped to inform future policy with regard to the principal's role in teacher evaluations at the building level and in terms of the more general implementation process for state-level initiatives and policy changes.

**Implications for future research.** This study also had the potential to serve as the foundation for future research endeavors. One way that the present research may be expanded in the future is by exploring different stakeholders' critical sensemaking of the evaluation process. These stakeholders may include teachers, central office personnel or other district administrators, who serve as evaluators. Additionally, future research may be able to explore the function of the District Evaluation Advisory Committees (DEAC) in impacting school-level policy changes with regard to the new teacher evaluations. DEACs are required of all New Jersey school districts to oversee the implementation of AchieveNJ in accordance with new state guidelines (NJDOE, 2014b). Finally, this research may be expanded in the future to explore the training materials associated with the Danielson FFT by observing training sessions used to calibrate evaluations and achieve inter-rater reliability among multiple evaluators in the same building.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Wodak and Meyer (2013) suggest that sampling strategies for CDA primarily focus on "typical texts" and use theoretical sampling. As previously discussed, this study focused on Danielson's FFT, one of the most widely used and approved teacher evaluation models under the new mandates (McGuinn, 2012), and it certainly qualified as a "typical text" based on its widespread popularity among districts across the state. In addition, because teacher evaluation continues to be in its first few years of implementation, this topic may also be considered what Fairclough (2010) describes as "productive" as "there are significant semiotic features of the topic which have not been sufficiently attended to in existing social research" (p. 235). I employed what Patton (2002) refers to as purposeful sampling to solicit participation from principals for the

study as I intend to include a homogenous group in order to align participants with the study's purpose. The "semiotic point of entry" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 237) for the project was to explore the critical sensemaking processes among New Jersey principals, who were using the Danielson FFT in their schools.

Because qualitative research employs an emergent or cyclical process that is continually shaped by the researcher's "construction of knowledge" (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 5), it was also important that I understood my position within my intended research context. As a qualitative researcher, it was important that I practiced reflexivity and acknowledged the impact that my position may have had on the findings (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002). As a teacher and researcher, I functioned as both an insider and outsider within this context. That is, I was an insider in that I was subject to the new teacher evaluation policies and procedures, including the use of the Danielson FFT. However, I was also an outsider in that I was not a principal, and I had very little professional contact, if any, with the principals, who participated in the research. It is important to note that my position likely affected the results of the study.

**Potential limitations.** Throughout this study, I attempted to remain faithful to rigorous standards for qualitative research practice through my participant sampling, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. However, it is important to note the potential limitations with the study's design before moving forward. First, this study may have been limited by the timeframe in which I intended to complete it. That is, principals had limited time in which they were able to participate in interviews, and therefore, I intended to complete the majority of interviewing during the summer months when school was not

in session in the hopes that they would have more time to discuss their understanding of teacher evaluations and reflect on the prior year's implementation.

In addition, some have argued that interviews as a data collection method may be inherently limiting because any discursive event is contextually based (Rapley, 2007). Participants' responses were likely affected by the sheer fact that data was collected via a researcher-led interview session (Rapley, 2007). However, this potential limitation was addressed in this study in a few ways. First, I used more than researcher-led interviews with principals as my sole data collection method. Additionally, all interview transcripts were member checked to ensure that transcripts and written summaries accurately reflected the participants' responses (Creswell, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Finally, my dissertation advisor, who was both familiar with my topic and coding procedures, completed an expert review of my data collection and analysis procedures to ensure that the coding process was consistent with an outsider's perspective.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

In the pages that follow, chapter two begins with a discussion of the historical context and an abridged review of the literature as it relates to significant concepts driving this study. Chapter three will provide a detailed description of research methods. Chapter 4 will then delineate the findings from the study, analyzing the data in light of current literature and theory. This chapter will also explore the broader meaning that emerged from the findings in terms of policy, practice, and future research. Finally, chapters 5 and 6 will be presented as two manuscripts for publication in peer-reviewed journals.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review and Setting of the Study**

This chapter begins by outlining the theoretical and empirical foundations from which this study emerged and through which it was subsequently framed. The chapter also provides an abridged literature review, which explores the changing landscape of teacher evaluations at home and abroad, paying particular attention to research that has focused on the principal's role and the processes and systems changes through which accountability mandates have been implemented at the school-level. The topics included establish this project's place within the greater scholarly discourse and include discussion of the global emergence of neoliberal policies associated with teacher evaluation practices in countries around the world, the role of the Obama administration's RTTT initiative as a continuation of some practices that began with the Bush administration's NCLB program, and also an examination the recent use of Value Added Models (VAMs) for teacher evaluation from states across the country. In addition, this chapter also addresses the way in which the project aligns with and diverges from the current research that explores the principal's role as a mediator and change agent, how principals must make meaning of new accountability policies, and how they are impacted the shifting power dynamics at the state and federal level. Finally, this chapter describes the specific contextual factors of the schools in which the research took place.

### **Theoretical Framework and Empirical Foundations**

**Neoliberalism, Foucault, and technologies.** Beginning in the 1970s, neoliberal ideology increasingly gained popularity in various areas of the public sector, including education. With the creation of systems and procedures that were based on free-market

principles, neoliberalism has arguably become a hegemonic ideal and framework through which many have come to understand the value of education (Harvey, 2005; Tienken, 2013). One of the characteristic qualities of neoliberal policies and reforms became what Harvey (2005) refers to as the “fetish belief” in improvements via technological change. He writes that the “theory of technological change relies upon coercive powers of competition to drive the search for new products, new production methods, and new organizational form” (p. 68). Technological change and innovation would allow the formation of global networks to support financial growth and sound businesses both in the United States and abroad. What was good for business was good for the state, which led to an increase in the search for new technology, interventions of outside or “elite” experts in times of crisis, placement of the interests of the individual before the collective group, and the creation of partnerships between public and private entities (Harvey, 2005). However, the enforcement of market principles may be in conflict with promotion of individual rights as competition perpetuates concentration of power in the hands of a few individuals or entities (Harvey, 2005).

Neoconservatism emerged as a response to these contradictions by emphasizing “order as the answer to the chaos of individual interests” within a deceptively genteel framework of higher, moral purposes (Harvey, 2005, p. 82). Neoconservatism stressed free market principles through strict surveillance and enforcement in order to reach what was framed as a moral goal or answer to some larger crisis. Taken together, these trends toward structuring and monitoring practice through the use of new technologies and promoting the value of the free market are important for scholars to consider as education



is more readily viewed through a framework that often quantifies the quality of students' and educators' work.

Contemporaneously with the rise in popularity of neoliberal ideology during the 1970s, Michel Foucault increasingly addressed the influence of “technologies” or “techniques” in his work in a much broader sense beyond the simple pragmatic applications of new tools, systems, or machines to improve operations or communications. Foucauldian philosophy and specifically his exploration of power dynamics and social systems have profoundly impacted numerous disciplinary studies, including anthropology, sociology, political science, literary studies, history and historiography, information systems studies, and sociolinguistics to name only a few (Ball, 2013; Behrent, 2013; Pyyhtinen & Tamminen, 2011; White, 1987; Willcocks, 2006; Wolfreys, 1999). For Foucault, technologies were “the ways in which modern social and political systems control, supervise, and manipulate populations as well as individuals,” and he used the term in order to explore the power dynamics inherent in various systems that carried “professions of neutrality” (Behrent, 2013, p. 55). That is, Foucault sought to explore how seemingly innocuous systems were in fact anything but neutral, modes through which some could maintain power and control.

**Technologisation of discourse: Understanding the Danielson FFT.** Foucault's influence is also found in work of critical discourse theorists like Norman Fairclough. Fairclough's conception of the technologisation of discourse draws on the Foucauldian idea of technologies as instruments of power. As previously discussed, Fairclough (2010) explains the technologisation of discourse as “a process of intervention in the sphere of discourse practices with the objective of constructing a new hegemony in the order of

discourse of the institution or organization concerned...” (p. 137). Through this process, the technologisation of discourse is achieved through “redesigning existing discursive practices and training institutional personnel in the redesigned practices, on the basis of research into the existing discursive practices of the institution and their effectivity...” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 137). Effectiveness, quality control, and new systems of management characterize many neoliberal policies in this vein. The creation of a climate that is good for both business and sustains healthy markets is the primary end goal of many such policies, superseding the importance of adhering to any fixed means by which the state attains it (Harvey, 2005).

The fallout from such measures, however, have arguably led to gross inequality, with the concentration of power in the hands of the few elite and the dissolution of rights and power among those in the collective labor market (Ball, 2003; Giroux, 2010; Harvey, 2005). In theory, the individual has the potential to become highly successful, but only under privileged conditions. This increased responsibility on the part of the individual also suggests that any “personal failure is generally attributed to personal failings” (Harvey, 2005, p. 76). This philosophy is the foundation on which many teacher evaluation systems now rest. Fairclough’s (2010) five characteristics of technologisation of discourse provide a theoretical framework by which we may understand the topic of this study within the context of a greater neoliberal and neoconservative policy environment.

The first characteristic is “the emergence of expert ‘discourse technologists,’” who are described as “expert[s] or consultant[s] with privileged access to scientific information, and their interventions into discursive practice therefore carry the aura of

‘truth’” (p. 138). These discourse technologists often emerge from outside of the profession or immediate context. The second characteristic is “a shift in the policing of discourse practices” which is “from a local institutional level to a transinstitutional level, and from categories of agent within particular institutions (be it education, law, medicine) to discourse technologists as outsiders” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 139). The third characteristic includes the “design and projection of context-free discourse techniques,” which are “usable in any relevant context” (Fairclough, 2010, pp. 138, 139). This, Fairclough (2010) explains, is an example of colonization of the local discourse by the “outside.” Fairclough (2010) describes the fourth and fifth characteristics of the technologisation of discourse as “strategically motivated simulation in discourse” and “pressure towards standardization of discourse practice” (p. 138). Simulation is “the conscious and systematic grafting onto a discourse technique of discourse practices originating elsewhere, on the basis of a strategic calculation of their effectivity” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 139). That is, technologisation of discourse suggests not only that the content or message of the discourse changes, but even the way in which it is conveyed through a particular medium or method.

**Cognitive dissonance, crisis, and Weick’s sensemaking.** When faced with rapid change, one way of understanding how people and organizations cope is through the process of sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking is a dialectical meaning-making process that moves beyond simple interpretation of an event or crisis. Rather, “sensemaking is about authoring as well as interpretation, creation as well as discovery” (Weick, 1995, p. 8). Sensemaking, in part, is grounded in Festinger’s (1957) cognitive dissonance theory, which is based on the principle that people seek consistency in what

they believe to be true about themselves, others, and their surroundings. When confronted with a new or ambiguous situation, a person is likely to retrospectively rationalize his or her past actions and current decisions in order to return to a sense of cognitive consistency (Weick, 1995).

Sensemaking is also conceptually related to the Foucauldian theories that undergird Fairclough's (2010) technologisation of discourse, the first part of the theoretical framework used in this study. While Weick (1995) does not draw direct references from Foucault's work, Foucault was deeply interested in a related concept. Foucault sought to explore what Prado (2005) refers to as the "experiential use of truth," which is "about the realization or resolution achieved through the cognitive dissonance and reflection that various sorts of crises force on us" (p. 93-94). Crises and technological responses punctuate the present climate of teacher evaluation reform, and this serves, in part, as the rationale for using Fairclough's (2010) conception of the technologisation of discourse and sensemaking (or more specifically, critical sensemaking) as a two-part theoretical framework for this study.

**Critical sensemaking.** Weick (1995) first outlined seven properties of sensemaking from which Helms Mills et al. (2010) and others have derived critical sensemaking. Generally, sensemaking is a process that is "grounded in identity construction," meaning all sensemaking is shaped by one's lived experiences (Weick, 1995, p. 18). It is also retrospective in that a person compares his or her prior experiences to the present circumstances in order to make meaning, and it is also "enactive of sensible environments," which means that the process is dialectically related to the environment in which it occurs (Weick, 1995, p. 30). It is a social process and is influenced by a person's

interactions with others and “an organization’s rules, routines, symbols, and language ... [which] provide routines or scripts for appropriate conduct” (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 185). In essence, sensemaking both creates and is impacted by the environment, and it cannot be divorced from the context in which it occurs.

Weick (1995) also identified sensemaking as an ongoing process, one that “never starts,” because it is iterative and constant (p. 43). It is also contingent upon the way in which individuals focus on and extract particular cues. Extracted cues are “simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring,” and an individual uses this information in order to make meaning when presented with a new situation (Weick, 1995, p. 50). Sensemaking is also “driven by plausibility rather than accuracy,” which means that an individual will base his or her meaning making on what seems likely in a given situation and not necessarily on what is correct or factual (Weick, 1995, p. 55). This is philosophically resonant with a post-positivist approach to research, which contends that truth is not fixed, but contingent upon an individual’s lived experiences and perspective (Thurlow, 2010).

Although critical sensemaking accounts for these seven basic elements, it takes the concepts a step further to include issues concerning power, privilege, and dominance (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Thurlow, 2010; Weick, 1995). Helms Mills et al. (2010) further note:

Since sensemaking happens within a social context and as an ongoing process, and it also occurs within a broader context of organizational power and social experience, the process of critical sensemaking may be most effectively

understood as a complex process that occurs within, and is influenced by, a broader social environment. (p. 188)

While critical sensemaking is often associated with case study research, its emphasis that the meaning-making process occurs within a broader social context is resonant with the central tenants of CDA (Thurlow, 2010). More specifically, this idea closely aligns with Fairclough's (2010) understanding of discursive events as constituting the text, its production, interpretation, and the power dynamics (both conspicuous and latent) that accompany the text's use in practice.

By triangulating methodologies, emphasizing the heuristic qualities of sensemaking, and emphasizing the importance of reflexivity on the part of the researcher, critical sensemaking offers a "framework for understanding how individuals make sense of their environments at a local level while acknowledging power relations in the broader societal context" (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 190). The seven properties of sensemaking alone are insufficient to account for the way in which some individuals are more influential than others on the collective meaning making process among various members of an organization (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Thurlow, 2010). Critical sensemaking, therefore, accounts for the power or influence that some members hold, which thereby impacts the ways in which others within the organization make sense of particular events or crises (Thurlow, 2010). Critical sensemaking emphasizes the "concept of organizational power[, which] places local meanings in a broader understanding of privilege" (Thurlow, 2010, p. 257).

Critical sensemaking is an extension of organizational rules theory, which explains that both written and unwritten rules or expectations for workplace behavior and

conduct may be “experienced as a form of control, guidance, and definition” (Mills, 2004, p. 141). Rules may be understood to be empowering or restricting depending on the context and the ways in which a person interacts with them. A person, who is responsible for creating the rules, interacts differently with the rules than one, who is responsible for either enforcing or following them (Mills, 2004).

Beyond the organizational level, critical sensemaking also incorporates the concept of meta-rules, which are those rules that extend beyond the immediate context of an organization and can include such ideas as “privatization, competition, and globalization” (Thurlow, 2010, p. 257). Thurlow (2010) further notes:

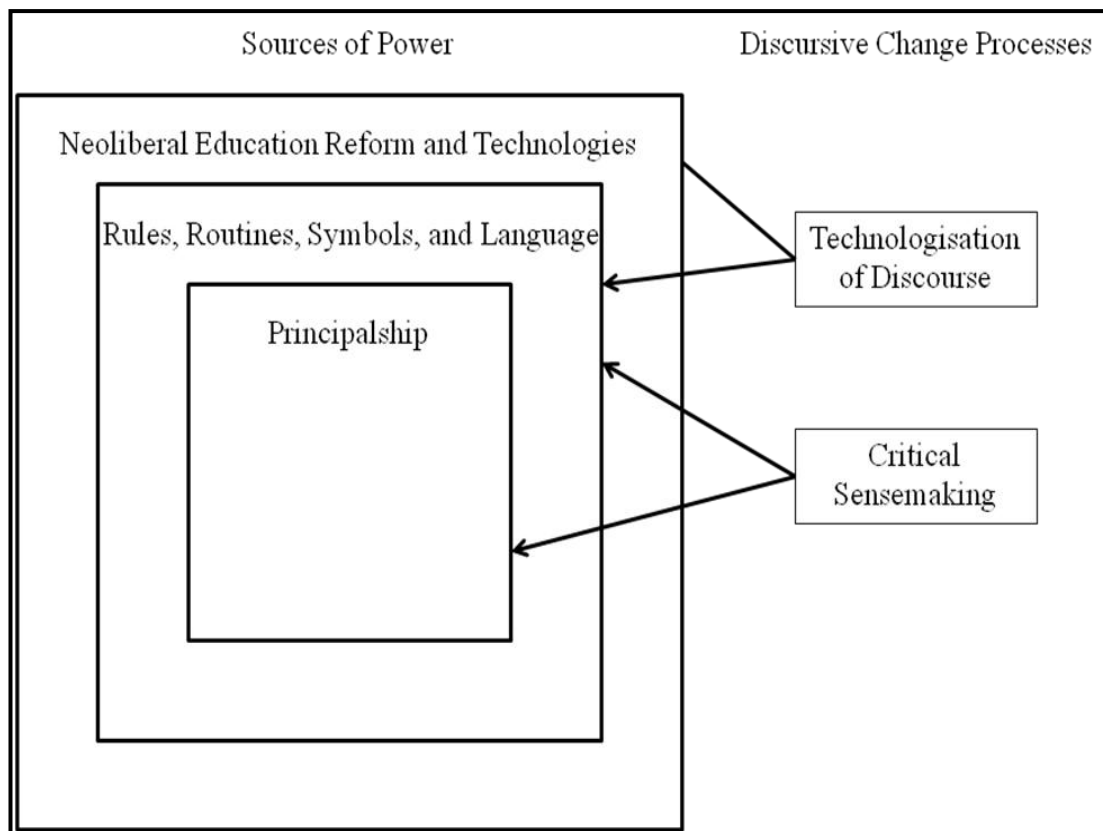
Although powerful actors in the organization may set the direction for the rules that will provide a sense of cohesion within the organization, they are themselves constrained by meta-rules and formative contexts that limit the availability of alternatives they may select from within a broader formative context. (p. 258)

A formative context limits the plausible and viable options that an individual may have when making sense of a new situation (Thurlow, 2010). Within the broader context of neoliberal education reform, these particular meta-rules are certainly indicative of what is arguably a form of technologisation of discourse with teacher evaluation policies, procedures, and rules.

Figure 1 depicts how the theories of the technologisation of discourse and critical sensemaking framed the study and helped guide the creation of the research questions. On the left, the three boxes represent interrelated sources of power. The largest and most exterior box represents the source of power that emanates from external education reform initiatives and technologies, mandates and trends that are responsible for defining some

“meta-rules” by which educational institutions must operate. This impacts the various rules, routines, symbols, and language within each school district, which is represented in the diagram as the intermediate source of power. The influence of the former on the latter represents a level of discursive change, which is portrayed on the right side of the diagram as the technologisation of discourse. The most central source of power that was examined in this study was the principal’s role. Principalship is an additional source of power because of the principal’s position as the instructional leader within a school. The interaction between the intermediate source of power (i.e., rules, routines, symbols, and language) and the central source of power (i.e., the principalship) are interrelated through the dialectical discursive change process of critical sensemaking. This is represented by a double-sided arrow between the two sources of power because the principal’s critical sensemaking process is both impacted by and impacts the rules, routines, symbols, and language in his or her school.





*Figure 1.* A two-part theoretical framework, incorporating the technologisation of discourse and critical sensemaking, guided the selection of methods and the formation of research questions for this study.

## **Review of the Literature**

Although there are varying systems of teacher evaluation across the globe, neoliberalism and economic globalization have created a global environment where teacher evaluation, assessment, and quality control have become more standardized and systematic (Larsen, 2005; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). More generally, public sector jobs, and particularly, education, have been heavily influenced by business models (Larsen, 2005; Pini & Gorostiaga, 2008). Fowler (2013) notes that school reform movements that target teacher evaluation can be found globally, and “this suggests that there are deeper reasons for the movement in the United States than purely political ones” (pp. 314-315).

Globalization of economic markets and the influence of an ever-increasingly connected global infrastructure are the main factors that are affecting many school reforms, including teacher evaluation systems and “under economic globalization we are witnessing the development of a global market that privileges a neo-liberal economic ideology” (Larsen, 2005, p. 293). This, in turn, has impacted the ways in which many Western countries have emphasized particular values (accountability, quality control, standards, competition, and performance) in teacher evaluation policies.

Around the world, many governments have adopted the values of “managerialism,” suggesting business-oriented values have been established within the discourse on quality education (Larsen, 2005; Pini & Gorostiaga, 2008). Referencing Davis et al. (2000), Larsen (2005) argues that principals have become “school managers” with the advent of new teacher evaluation systems (p. 299). In addition to policies promoting managerialism, Latin America has also seen policies that emphasize decentralization, the promotion of school autonomy, and the development of national evaluation systems (Pini & Gorostiaga, 2008). Because it is likely that economic globalization will continue to increasingly affect our schools and students, education reform movements, including teacher evaluation systems, will continue to be impacted by the global economy and business interests (Larsen, 2005; Lathan, 2011; Lonsbury & Apple, 2012).

Yet, there are also key differences between various accountability measures that are being implemented in the United States when compared to other countries (Spillane & Kenney, 2012). When compared to countries whose education systems either originate with the state or result from former colonial influence, there may be less diversity in the

needs, desires, and expectations of stakeholders (Spillane & Kenney, 2012). Additionally, the often confusing “tangled web” of school governance structures in the United States’ educational systems is accompanied by equally confusing, contradictory, or entirely lacking support structures for implementation at a more local level (Epstein, 2004). Despite this fact, however, the rhetoric from philanthropists, politicians, and pundits alike is fraught with comparisons between the performance of US school students and their teachers to those in schools overseas (Ball, 2003; Giroux, 2010; World Economic Forum, 2015; Zakaria, 2014). Competition, not unlike many neoliberal policies, is emphasized. As a result, teachers and other educational professionals are essentially not only evaluated against their peers, but also against others, who are working in different contexts across the globe.

**RTTT and the influence of VAMs.** In recent years, the United States has seen a push to quantify the education profession as a whole. This is certainly in line with the greater context of neoliberal business-oriented values, and RTTT uses economic incentives in order to do so (Koppich & Esch, 2012). As a direct result of RTTT, almost all of the 36 states, which applied for grant money through the initiative, committed to reforming teacher evaluation procedures, and some states even proposed widespread tenure reform policies such as New Jersey, Florida, Nevada, and Ohio (Koppich & Esch, 2012). Federal policies, and specifically RTTT, promoted the use of evaluation models that quantify teacher quality. This is perhaps most notable through the use of VAMs. VAMs tie teacher performance to student achievement indicators like standardized tests scores (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010; Yeh, 2012). Tennessee has used VAMs since 1998, and other places such as New York, Louisiana, Colorado, North Carolina, and the City of

Los Angeles, are exploring the use of VAMs in the near future (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010; Yeh, 2012). However, there is not a clear consensus on the effectiveness of VAMs in evaluating teacher performance (Goldhaber, Goldschmidt, & Tseng, 2013).

Yeh (2012) found that although VAM is inexpensive to calculate, it is actually very expensive to execute in practice. The study analyzed an extreme case, using VAM to fire the bottom 40% of a teaching force, in order to demonstrate its use in practice, but ultimately found that VAM would likely not hold up in court if it was to be used as a method for determining job retention for teachers. Similarly, Hill, Kapitula, and Umland (2011) note that there is a great deal of debate about how VAM should be calculated, what bearing the scores should hold for job retention, and whether VAM should be calculated across a single or multiple years. Some argue that VAM should be used along with other tools for evaluation, such as direct observation (Hill et al., 2011; Jacob & Lefgren, 2008); however, this still may not be effective as Hill et al. (2011) found that some teachers, who scored high on the VAM, performed poorly in observations.

The quantification of teacher performance and the broader trend toward standardization and quality control has also called into question how these and other seemingly objective measures of both teacher and student performance are impacted by varying student populations and socio-economic factors (Hill et al., 2011; Spillane & Kenney, 2012; Tienken, 2013). That is, student populations matter. Hill et al. (2011) found that teachers, with the highest performing students, seemed to perform much better with VAMs, even when differences in student demographics were accounted for. Conversely, those teachers, who taught special education or remedial classes, performed lower using VAMs. Hill et al. (2011) ultimately concluded that this could have far-

reaching negative consequences as teachers may be less likely to want to teach the lowest performing students if their job security was tied to such measures.

The same holds true on a larger scale at the school level with various contextual factors influencing how the school leaders, and by extension, the school community feels the pressure to measure up (Spillane et al., 2002; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). A principals' interpretations of what it means to be accountable when faced with challenges (i.e., rapid changes in student demographics and needs) may lead him or her to represent accountability differently for the staff, which could ultimately resulted in varying implementations of the same policies (Spillane et al., 2002). School leaders must navigate the new policies and attempt to reframe their respective organizations so as to remain "legitimate" in the eyes of their stakeholders and fully comply with required mandates: "in the era of high-stakes accountability tied to student performance, the threats to legitimacy are greatest in schools enrolling poor students, students of color, and students for whom English is not a first language" (Spillane & Kenney, 2012, p. 548). These threats to "legitimacy" are most present in those schools that struggle to meet the demands of the neoliberal, marketized value system that stresses quantifiable accountability (Spillane & Kenney, 2012).

**Principals and policy implementation.** Even though quantification methods and seemingly objective measures for evaluating teacher effectiveness have increased in popularity in recent years, the subjective role of the school leader is undeniably pivotal to the implementation process of any such change initiative. Policy implementation is not static, but rather a dynamic and organic process that is highly contextual (Ingle et al., 2011; Koyama & Varenne, 2012; Louis & Robinson, 2012; Spillane, Parise, & Sherer,

2011). As Koyama and Varenne (2012) explain, “Policy is productive. But the resulting arrangements are never simply linear ‘implementations,’ especially when they involve a large number of actors with varying authorities and knowledges, interacting with the policy over time” (p. 158). That is, principals and other building-level leaders at the forefront of implementation efforts are essential to how policy develops. Understanding and accounting for the principal’s role is also vitally important because “principals have an internal understanding of the complex environments of school and processes, including hiring and on-the-job-performance that academicians and policy makers lack” (Ingle et al., 2011, pp. 602-603). As instructional leaders of their buildings, principals play a crucial role in shaping policy (Koyama & Varenne, 2012; Spillane & Kenney, 2012; Spillane et al., 2011).

Researchers have found that principals are influential and function in an intermediary position between the outside environment and internal school community as they make sense of policies, communicate the mandates to their stakeholders, and even create new routines or procedures to comply with external requirements and maintain internal consistency (Ingle et al., 2011; Koyama, 2014; Louis & Robinson, 2012; Spillane et al., 2002; Spillane & Kenney, 2012; Spillane et al., 2011). In an examination of the effects of a recent policy change within the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), which made it easier for principals to dismiss probationary teachers without having to prove just cause, Jacob (2011) found that principals played a key role in teacher evaluation policy implementation: “principals beliefs and preferences are key factors in determining whether this policy (or, e.g., the teacher evaluations policies being enacted as part of Race to the Top legislation) will improve student achievement” (p. 404). Similarly, Ingle

et al.'s (2011) study found the use of objective test score data for teacher evaluation was negated by the principal's subjective understanding of his or her environment. The ways in which principals understand policies can have a profound impact on their implementation (Ingle et al., 2011; Jacob, 2011; Koyama, 2014; Koyama & Varenne, 2012; Louis & Robinson, 2012; Spillane et al., 2002; Spillane & Kenney, 2012).

Therefore, principals' perspectives on teacher quality are of vital importance when determining and making meaning of the oft ambiguous notion of "teacher quality." The principal's role and teacher evaluation policy formation are dialectically related. Principals essentially function as "local policy makers" and they "play active policy roles in negotiating federal regulations and local initiatives, as well as selectively performing assessment and accountability mandates" (Koyama, 2014, pp. 279, 282). Principals are both impacted by and impact new policies as they implement changes in their schools (Ingle et al., 2011; Jacob, 2011; Larsen, 2005). Some argue that objective measures of teacher quality are not sufficient to capture the "complexity of human resource functions in education" and an oversimplification denies the "importance of contextualizing human resource decisions within the organizational and policy context in which they occur" (Ingle et al., 2011, p. 603). A principal's experiences, the immediate school context, and the broader policy context all impact his or her decisions about teacher performance.

Simply explaining how principals enact accountability policies in terms of causal theory is not sufficient in what has been determined to be a highly individualized and complex process (Koyama, 2014; Rutledge et al., 2010; Spillane et al., 2002). A principal's identity, prior experiences, and the stage at which his or her school is in the change process all influence the principal's sensemaking of accountability and

implementation of new policies (Spillane et al., 2002). Accountability mandates and initiatives coming from state and federal government may also impact principals' hiring decisions, compliance to directives, how they serve as instructional leaders in their buildings, and the ways in which the school complies with mandates (Louis & Robinson, 2012; Rutledge et al., 2010).

**The principal's role in compliance or meaningful change.** Even though the research shows the vital role that principals play in shaping policy through the implementation process, district and school-level administrators seem to have less authority or control when it comes to policy, including those that impact teacher evaluations. Research has pointed to the increasingly influential role of external agencies or resources, primarily from the private sector, whose function it is to support schools in implementation of various reforms due to an overwhelming lack of infrastructure and capacity (Honig, 2004; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). For example, New Jersey's pilot program for TeachNJ "required schools to use external evaluators to provide a second set of observations to deal with the issue of principal bias" (McGuinn, 2012, p. 22). This suggests that more power is taken away from the school-level governance structures as principals are essentially assumed to be unreliable on their own in evaluating their teachers. Kirst (2004) rightly asks, "What happens to administrators' authority, particularly that of principals, when such contracts [or policies] filter down through the loosely coupled school system?" (p. 25). Rather than being the force behind change, these stakeholders may be relegated to a position focused on implementation of reforms outside of their control.



Even though “local school board members, as well as superintendents, principals, and teachers, have less and less say over education, the public still holds them accountable for school results” (Kirst, 2004, p. 39). Principals and teachers may be the targets of negative press and attention when policy implementation does not achieve the desired goals promised by the state or federal officials even though governors and other state officials have lately played an increasingly influential role in educational policy decisions (Gabbard & Atkinson, 2007; Gittell & McKenna, 1999; Henig, 2009; Kirst, 2004; Koyama, 2014; Lathan, 2011; McGuinn, 2011; Mokher, 2010; Shober, 2012). To compound this problem, if the role of state education agencies are unclear in the new reform-focused landscape, schools may be “wary of being candid about whether and how they might be struggling to implement reform and made them reluctant to seek out assistance” (McGuinn, 2012, p. 3). Schools do not necessarily feel the pressures for compliance equally based on extenuating circumstances that may impact the academic performance of their particular student population (Spillane & Kenney, 2012).

There is some discrepancy in the literature about how principals are addressing external accountability mandates, whether through superficial compliance or by creating meaningful change in response to them (Ingle et al., 2011; Rutledge et al., 2010). Principals may enact policy within their buildings through surface-level or symbolic compliance by, for example, rewriting the school’s mission statement or using the rhetoric of reform without following through with action, consciously keeping operations at a discourse level (Rutledge et al., 2010). Principals may also act as a mediating force within a policy environment, which is driven by increased pressures from accountability mandates (Ingle et al., 2011; Koyama, 2014; Rutledge et al., 2010; Spillane & Kenney,

2012). The process by which principals navigate, interpret, and implement policies may simply represent an “ephemeral and loosely coupled assemblage” of compliance or principals may be involved in “gaming the system” when presented with new accountability mandates (Koyama, 2014, p. 281; Spillane & Kenney, 2012).

However, others, such as Ingle et al. (2011) and Rutledge et al. (2010), have noted that what appears to be simple, superficial compliance may not be passive resistance or manipulation on the part of principals, but rather, could be a way that principals are attempting to modify practice in good faith, dealing with and ultimately interpreting what are often ambiguous or unclearly defined directives. Louis and Robinson (2012) also found that the degree of implementation was more conditional. If principals saw accountability mandates as a hindrance, it was likely that they would lead a surface-level implementation. They note, “Oppositional thinking, that sees the conflict rather than the common ground between school-based improvement strategies and those of the state and district, will inhibit formulating a goal that is inclusive of both” (Louis & Robinson, 2012, p. 659). On the other hand, if the principals thought that the policies were aligned with their own visions, they were more likely to internalize the mandates, which the authors found had a positive impact on their behaviors in tailoring the mandates to their students’ and staffs’ needs (Louis & Robinson, 2012).

District and school-level personnel may be far removed from those who are responsible for initiating reforms, but principals play an undeniably pivotal role in the implementation process when faced with external demands (Epstein, 2004; Ingle et al., 2011; Kirst, 2004; Koyama, 2014; Koyama & Varenne, 2012; Louis & Robinson, 2012; Spillane et al., 2002; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). Principals are and will remain “primary

and important agents” in teacher evaluation (Ingle et al., 2011, p. 603). As previously discussed, there are numerous studies that explore how principals make meaning of and implement accountability policies in their schools, but there are far fewer examples that explore how principals implement teacher evaluation policies. Due to this dearth in the research and because implementation of New Jersey’s TeachNJ initiative is still in its formative years, this research contributed to the already existing literature that examined how principals made meaning of neoliberal policies that stressed accountability, standards, qualitative control, and competition.

### **The Context for the Study**

Schools experience different pressures to implement policy based on their context, the student populations whom they serve, and the challenges that they may face within the greater community (Spillane & Kenney, 2012). The “semiotic point of entry” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 237) for the project was to explore the critical sensemaking processes among New Jersey principals, who were currently using the Danielson FFT in their schools.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Methodology<sup>1</sup>**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how principals make meaning of the Danielson FFT. This research sought to analyze the principal's role in the greater discourse surrounding teacher evaluation reform in addition to examining how the principals' critical sensemaking existed in a liminal space between the texts produced outside of the school and district context (i.e., the Danielson FFT) and those that were used by principals within their schools. This study used CDA, and specifically employed a dialectical-relational approach, in order to more fully understand how these documents were strategies for change. This study also took what Fairclough (2010) refers to as a transdisciplinary approach in order to explore the discourse surrounding teacher evaluation models through Helms Mills et al.'s (2010) critical sensemaking theory and Fairclough's (2010) conception of the technologisation of discourse. In addition to exploring the documents associated with the FFT, I conducted interviews with a purposeful sample of principals, instructional leaders within their respective buildings, in order to better understand how they made meaning of the new evaluations in addition to critically analyzing the material culture associated with the Danielson FFT that was used in each principal's respective school.

This research was guided by the following essential questions, which were adapted from Fairclough's (2010) recommendations for CDA of strategies in response to crisis:

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<sup>1</sup> As will be discussed further in this section, this research took a dialectical-relational approach to CDA. Fairclough (2010) explains that this approach is best described as a "methodology" rather than a "method" as it is reliant on the way in which the researcher theoretically frames the researchable object: "it is not just a matter of 'applying methods' in the usual sense – we cannot so sharply separate theory and method" (p. 234). Therefore, here and throughout, I refer to the "methodology" of the dialectical-relational approach rather than the "methods" in accordance with Fairclough's (2010) guidelines and philosophy.

1. What strategies for change have emerged within the discourse of New Jersey's approved teacher evaluation models, and specifically, the Danielson FFT?
2. What are the origins of these strategies for change within the Danielson FFT?
3. How do principals function as "social agents" in promoting the discourse emergent from changes to New Jersey's teacher evaluations?

### **Research Design and Strategy of Inquiry**

Qualitative research is a naturalistic approach used to answer questions in the real world and explore social phenomena (Creswell, 2014; Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). It is an approach that is cyclical, iterative, and emergent in nature, and it is used when one is looking to further explore and understand various social processes, phenomena, or meanings behind experiences, actions, or other social events (Maxwell, 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Qualitative research is based on the assumption that truth is relative and subjectively situated and that the beliefs, values, or lived experiences of the participants represent the primary focus for exploration (Creswell, 2014; Lather, 1986; Maxwell, 2013). As such, the qualitative researcher must be aware of and make known his or her position within the research (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Some warn, however, that a "radical constructivist" approach, which assumes that there is no truth outside of our own constructions of reality, is neither reasonable nor beneficial to qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013, p. 30). Although the value and credibility of qualitative research has been challenged in the past, qualitative inquiry is particularly valuable for educational professionals because it helps to inform practice, enhance decision-making, and stimulate dialogue between practitioners and scholars (Atkinson &

Delamont, 2006; DiPardo et al., 2006; Lather, 1986;). For this study, I looked to understand principals' emic perspectives (Rossman & Rallis, 2012), and therefore, qualitative research was an appropriate research design.

More specifically, this study used the dialectical-relational approach to CDA as a methodology. As Fairclough (2010) explains, a rationale for the selection of methodology is integral to understanding both the researcher and that which will be researched:

Settling on a methodology for a particular research project is not just a matter of selecting from an existing repertoire of methods. It is a theoretical process which constructs an *object of research* (a researchable object, a set of researchable questions) for the research topic by bringing to bear on it relevant theoretical perspectives and frameworks. (p. 225)

CDA is a "heterogeneous school," which "allows for continuous debates, for changes in the aims and goals, and for innovation" (Wodak & Meyer, 2013, p. 5). The variability of the methods among CDA researchers is suggestive of its underlying philosophy and directly relates to a social constructivist perspective and philosophical worldview. Even though the approaches to CDA are quite varied, there are several characteristics that are central to this strategy of inquiry. All CDA is problem-oriented and interested in "de-mystifying ideologies and power through the systematic and *retroductable* investigation of semiotic data" (Wodak & Meyer, 2013, p. 3). In addition, it is important that the researcher reflects on and outlines his or her position, interests, and potential biases throughout the research process: "CDA researchers have to be aware that their own work is driven by social, economic and political motives like any other academic work and that they are not in any privileged position" (Wodak & Meyer, 2013, p. 7). Because the study

took a critical approach and sought to examine the discursive change processes associated with various sources of power, both external and within the school community, it necessitated that I carefully examine my role as a researcher, how these power structures impacted my work, and how my position also impacted my examination of them. In addition, the study sought to explore the texts associated with the Danielson FFT in context by examining how principals made meaning of the discursive changes associated with the new reforms.

As a result, Fairclough's (2010) conception of CDA was appropriate for this study's purpose and design. Fairclough (2010) defines CDA as a way to:

[S]ystematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events, and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor in securing power and hegemony. (p. 93)

Fairclough (2010) uses a three-dimensional framework to analyze discursive events, including (a) the text, which may be spoken or written, (b) the discourse practice, which is the acts of production and interpretation, and (c) sociocultural practice, which centers on examining power relations implicit in the discourse on "situational, institutional, [and] societal" levels (p. 133). The text is situated at the center of the three-dimensional framework and is surrounded by the discourse practice, the intermediate dimension of discourse (Fairclough, 2010). These are then situated within the larger dimension of

discourse, which includes sociocultural practice. Fairclough (2010) explains that “[a] special feature of this approach is that the link between sociocultural practice and the text is mediated by discourse practice; how a text is produced or interpreted ...” (p. 132). This three-dimensional approach to CDA was appropriate for this study because it sought to examine the principal’s intermediary role between the external teacher evaluation reform environment and the texts associated with the changes within his or her school community.

Similarly, Wodak and Meyer (2013) emphasize, “it is very rare that a text is the work of only one person...texts are often sites of struggle in that they show traces of differing discourses and ideologies contending and struggling for dominance” (p. 10). That is, texts, including those used in order to comply with New Jersey’s new teacher evaluations, were mediated by and reinterpreted through their use by instructional leaders. Principals play a key role in interpreting and giving meaning to the evaluation models that their districts have handed down from central office, and therefore, this research aimed to explore their role in contributing to and their interpretation of this discourse.

**The dialectical-relational approach to CDA.** As previously discussed, CDA includes a wide range of approaches as a strategy of inquiry. This research used what Fairclough (2010) describes as a dialectical-relational approach to CDA as a methodology. The dialectical-relational approach to CDA is transdisciplinary, which is a form of interdisciplinary research, but is unique in “bringing disciplines and theories together to address research issues, it sees ‘dialogue’ between them as a source for the theoretical and methodological development of each of them” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 231).



The dialectical-relational approach to CDA was appropriate for this study because this research project incorporated critical sensemaking with the theory of technologisation of discourse, drawing on various fields for framing the researchable object and analyzing the data collected throughout the study.

Although Fairclough (2010) outlines four “stages” that comprise the dialectical-relational approach, they do not necessarily represent a straightforward or chronological process that the researcher must follow. Rather, the stages are iterative and cyclical as the process may “‘loop’ back to it [prior stages] in the light of subsequent steps” as the researcher continues to conceptualize the researchable object (Fairclough, 2010, p. 234). In light of this, the research process was organic, changing, and emergent for this project. The preliminary plan for the project is outlined in the following pages, using Fairclough’s (2010) descriptions of the four stages of the dialectical-relational approach to CDA.

The first stage, which “focus[es] upon a social wrong in its semiotic aspect” is comprised of two steps (Fairclough, 2010, p. 235). First, one must select a topic that addresses a “social wrong” that “can productively be approached in a transdisciplinary way” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 235). What constitutes a “social wrong” is wide-ranging, and for the purpose of this research, the larger “social wrong” is what has been dubbed a “crisis” facing public education. Teacher evaluation reform has become a way of ameliorating the crisis, and the semiotic aspects of this topic arose through the discourse associated with these strategies for change. While teacher evaluation reform and a study of the Danielson FFT may not seem like a “social wrong” that overtly impacts one’s well-being, the reform movement and subsequent evaluation frameworks are in response to what has been presented as a major crisis.

The second step in this first stage of the dialectical-relational approach is the necessity to “construct objects of research for initially identified research topics by theorizing them in a transdisciplinary way” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 236). This research explored these strategies for change, and specifically, the use of the Danielson FFT. By using theories of the technologisation of discourse and critical sensemaking, this research took a transdisciplinary approach to understanding how principals made meaning of the new teacher evaluations.

The second stage, which Fairclough (2010) identifies in the dialectical-relational approach to CDA is to “identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong” (p. 237). In this stage, the researcher must determine why the social wrong is not being addressed and decipher a “point of entry” for analysis. One may argue that the “crisis” facing public education is being addressed with the teacher evaluation reforms currently in place; however, one may also argue that a potential “social wrong” exists in terms of the reform movement itself. In other words, the standardization and quantification of evaluation practices may have far-reaching effects that are potentially disempowering for educators. The “obstacles” for this project were that the current evaluation methods may not be considered social wrongs at all, but rather, a way of mending a social wrong or “crisis” facing public education.

In this stage of the dialectical-relational approach to CDA, the researcher must also move beyond textual analysis to include an exploration of the social events or practices that comprise the discursive environment. Once key texts are selected and understood in context, the social wrong must be analyzed through both linguistic and interdiscursive analysis, which “compares how genres, discourses, and styles are

articulated together in a text as part of a specific event, and in more stable and durable orders of discourses as part of networks of practices...” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 238). The semiotic “point of entry” for this project was the Danielson FFT, and this research project focused on the “specific event” in terms of how principals were conceptualizing the new evaluations. The dialectical-relational approach to CDA and the use of interdiscursive analysis were also particularly appropriate for the focus of this study. Just as principals function as mediators between the external policy environment and their school communities, this interdiscursive analysis functions as a “mediating ‘interlevel’ which connects both linguistic analysis with relevant forms of social analysis...” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 238).

Stage three of the dialectical-relational approach to CDA requires that the researcher “consider whether the social order ‘needs’ the social wrong” to see if the social wrong that he or she has identified can or even should be the focus of eventual change (Fairclough, 2010, p. 238). This project was occasioned by changes in policies related to teacher evaluations in New Jersey, and because the changes were in their first few years of implementation, it was unlikely that one could argue that the changes were necessary to maintain social order. Rather, research on this topic provided a clearer understanding of “social wrongs” that may be present within the current “order” of teacher evaluations. Stage four of this approach to CDA, which is closely related to stage three, is where the researcher must “identify possible ways past the obstacles,” which “includes developing a semiotic ‘point of entry’ into research on the ways in which these obstacles are actually tested, challenged and resisted ...” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 239). In addition to using the texts associated with the Danielson FFT, the way in which

principals critically made meaning of the “obstacles” with the new evaluations represented this semiotic point of entry for the project.

### **Context and Sampling Strategy**

The selected context for this study emerged from the study’s purpose, which sought to explore the principal’s understanding of the changes to teacher evaluations in New Jersey. Wodak and Meyer (2013) suggest that sampling strategies for CDA primarily focus on “typical texts” and use theoretical sampling. As previously discussed, this study will focus on Danielson’s FFT, one of the most widely used and approved teacher evaluation models under the new mandates (McGuinn, 2012), and it certainly qualifies as a “typical text” based on its widespread popularity among districts across the state. In addition, because teacher evaluation is in its first few years of implementation, this topic may also be considered what Fairclough (2010) describes as “productive” as “there are significant semiotic features of the topic which have not been sufficiently attended to in existing social research” (p. 235). Exploration of principals’ meaning making process when implementing the Danielson FFT for teacher evaluations served as what Fairclough (2010) refers to as the “semiotic point of entry” for this project (p. 237). It was my goal to enlist the participation of principals, who were interested in exploring this topic further and would also mutually benefit from the research, providing participating principals with an opportunity to reflect on their practice and use of the Danielson FFT.

In order to select principals to participate and because of the study’s qualitative nature, I used purposeful sampling in order to solicit participation (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Unlike quantitative sampling strategies that often seek objectivity,

purposeful sampling is a qualitative sampling strategy that seeks to deeply explore cases, instances, or individual's experiences, which are particularly "information-rich" (Patton, 2002, p. 230). More specifically, I used theory-based sampling when seeking participants for this study. Theory-based sampling is when "the researcher samples incidents, slices of life, time periods, or people on the basis of their potential manifestation or representation of important theoretical constructs" (Patton, 2002, p. 238). This was an appropriate sampling strategy because I sought to include a homogenous group of principals to further explore their understanding of the Danielson FFT within the broader context of the technologisation of discourse. Both "sensemaking" and the "technologisation of discourse" served as the theoretical underpinnings for the study's purpose and methodology, and as a result, theory-based sampling aligned participants with the study's purpose.

**Sampling procedures.** It was my goal to enlist the participation of principals, who were interested in exploring this topic further and would also mutually benefit from the research, providing participating principals with an opportunity to reflect on their practice and use of the Danielson FFT. Monmouth University's School of Education (SOE)'s Principals' Academy served as the initial "entry point" for sampling. In 2010, Monmouth University, a small private university located in West Long Branch, began the SOE Principals' Academy, whose mission is as follows:

The purpose of the School of Education Principals' Academy is to create a forum for dialogue and an exchange of ideas and experiences. Using the university as a catalyst, the academy will provide professional growth opportunities for principals and assistant principals that will focus on dynamic leadership that

promotes reflective practice and affects teacher and student learning.

Additionally, it will create a network of support for colleagues and establish a collaborative relationship with the university, university faculty, and its resources.

(Monmouth University, 2015)

The Principals' Academy's mission directly aligned with this project's purpose. During the 2013-2014 school year, there were 38 member schools and 9 steering committee members from 7 different districts or institutions located throughout New Jersey that participated in the Principals' Academy, providing a large pool of prospective participants for this study (Monmouth University, 2015). Additionally, it was likely that those individuals, who elected to participate in Monmouth University's SOE Principals' Academy, were likewise interested in their professional growth and committed to reflective practice. Therefore, the Principals' Academy served as a suitable entry point for sampling prospective participants.

I contacted principals through Monmouth University SOE's Principals' Academy with the intent of soliciting participation from principals involved with the program. Because qualitative research is cyclical, iterative, and emergent in nature (Rossman & Rallis, 2012), I did not have a fixed number of participants for the project prior to data collection. Rather, I intended to continue interviewing principals until data saturation was reached, when "new categories, themes or explanations stop[ped] emerging from the data" (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). Data collection and analysis were concurrently conducted in order to determine data saturation. In addition, I used what Patton (2002) refers to as snowball or chain sampling, a process by which the researcher asks participants for suggestions or leads to other potential participants, who may have experiences worth

exploring. At the completion of each interview, I asked participants for recommendations of other prospective participants and subsequently followed the leads via phone or email.

The intent of the project was not to randomly sample participants for generalizability, but rather, to achieve a degree of transferability, which aims to relay confirmable, dependable information that may contribute to other research, while maintaining specificity or uniqueness of this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Toma, 2006). This project is transferable in that it could potentially be reproduced in other contexts, particularly because the Danielson FFT is so widely used across New Jersey and throughout the US. It should be noted, however, that one must acknowledge each context's uniqueness, and each school and principal's lived experiences are not necessarily representative of other districts with similar contexts culturally, racially, or socio-economically.

**Document sampling.** Beyond selecting districts that are using the Danielson FFT and analyzing the associated documents and materials on the Danielson website, I also sampled documents and materials from each participating principal's respective school for discourse analysis. Generally, discourse analysis is the process by which researchers may "demystify" and "interrupt" current discourse in order to reveal arbitrary legitimization for some voices and recognize the formerly unrecognized silenced voices (Jóhannesson, 2010, p. 258). Jóhannesson (2010) outlines some key steps that must be taken to complete discourse analysis, which informed the document sampling for this project. First, I had to determine which materials were important to evaluate with regard to each principal's use of the Danielson FFT. This process was emergent and iterative based on the interviews with the participants in their respective schools. Through this

process, I sought approval from the principals to complete further discourse analysis on artifacts related to the school's use of the Danielson FFT in their respective buildings. After analyzing the documents and materials provided, I considered a timeline for completing the discourse analysis, analyzed the documents using my guiding research questions, and identified any struggles or tensions in the discourse (Jóhannesson, 2010). From this, I determined whether there was a need to analyze more documents related to the material culture in each school (Jóhannesson, 2010).

### **Data Collection**

I used three sources to collect data throughout this project, which included (a) conducting semi-structured interviews with the principals, (b) completing a discourse analysis of the Danielson FFT, the Danielson Group's website, and each school's material culture associated with teacher evaluation, and (c) maintaining field notes in a researcher journal throughout the research process. This research focused on collecting data that examined key texts in addition to targeting the principals' "process of interpretation" or "discourse practice," which are represented by the central and the intermediate levels of Fairclough's (2010) three-levels of discursive practice. The data was subsequently interpreted and analyzed within the greater sociocultural context.

**Responsive interviewing.** I conducted interviews in order to better understand principals' meaning making processes, how they functioned as mediators between the external policy environment and their school contexts, and how they played a role within the larger technologisation of discourse associated with the Danielson FFT. Interviews are "conversations with purpose" (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 181) that allow participants to share their lived experiences and perspectives regarding the research topic



(Van Manen, 1994). They provide the opportunity for the researcher to ask specific questions to better understand the participant's thoughts regarding past events or actions, which is otherwise unobservable (Creswell, 2014). Interviews are particularly appropriate for studying a phenomenon that cannot be observed (Creswell, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012), and they may help "portray ongoing social processes" such as the sensemaking process (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 4).

Interviews were appropriate for this study because it sought to explore principals' critical sensemaking, which cannot be observed. Principals' past actions with regard to how they implemented new policies or procedures associated with the adoption of the Danielson FFT can also not be directly observed, making interviews an appropriate data collection method to gather information about their lived experiences. In addition, interviews are resonant with my paradigmatic assumptions and social constructivist worldview because this data collection method is based on the assumption that we may learn from speaking to others about how they perceive their experiences and interpret or construct their realities (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

For this project, I took a responsive-interviewing approach, allowing the conversation to stray from the protocol questions when appropriate based on the answers that the participants provided (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Responsive interviewing includes four key elements, including (a) the exploration of "context and richness while accepting the complexity and ambiguity of real life," (b) acknowledgement that both the participant's and researcher's experiences, emotions, and perspectives impact questions and responses, (c) an awareness of the "personal relationship" established during an interview exchange "carries obligations for reciprocity," and finally, (d) a flexible

structure that is responsive and adapts to each participant's answers (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 38). Responsive interviewing seeks to explore a research topic by tapping into a participant's experiences with answers that include "depth, detail, vividness, nuance, and richness" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 124).

In-depth interviewing strategies such as responsive interviewing allow the researcher to "examine overlapping explanations or apparent contradictions and tensions" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 50). Therefore, responsive interviewing was particularly appropriate for this project. Because this project used CDA as an approach, it sought to explore both the overt and subtle nuances inherent in the language used by principals as they described their experiences and sensemaking processes. Because I took a critical approach with this project, it was also important that I remained aware of my role and perspective's potential influence during interviews. Responsive interviewing attempts to counteract the possible imposition of the researcher's perspective through its flexible, exploratory structure, making this interviewing model an appropriate choice for this project.

**Discourse analysis: Generating an archive.** As previously discussed, this project used the dialectical-relational approach to CDA as a methodology. Because of the nature of both CDA and the project's purpose, I collected documents, both public and private, and generated an archive in order to more fully explore the researchable object in accordance with Fairclough's (2010) dimensions of discourse. According to Rapley (2007), an archive is "a diverse collection of materials that enable you to engage with and think about the specific research problem or questions" (p. 10). The materials that made up the archive were collected and subsequently analyzed according to the research

questions and the theoretical lens, both of which incorporated the principals' critical sensemaking process and the technologisation of discourse. Additionally, Foucault's (1972) conception of the archive as "'the system of discursivity' that establishes the possibility of what can be said" also aligned with this project's focus and critical approach (as cited in Manoff, 2004, p. 18). That is, the formation of an archive assumes particular power relations (both for the participants and the researcher) regarding what is included or "said" and what is left unsaid.

**Researcher journal and field notes.** Throughout this project, I also kept field notes in a researcher journal. Field notes "describe settings, activities, people and their interactions....[a]ll these records constitute the corpus of data from which your assertions should logically flow" (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 174). Field notes provide a researcher with a place to elaborate, reflect, and preliminarily analyze data throughout the data collection and analysis process (Glesne, 2006). Sometimes referred to as a "field journal" (Maxwell, 2013, pp. 20, 88), there are many different forms that field notes may take (Glesne, 2006), but for the purpose for this project, I chose to keep a researcher journal (Janesick, 1999). A researcher journal is tool through which I was able to collect and analyze data through a cyclical and emergent process that aligned with my chosen qualitative research methodology and CDA strategy of inquiry. A researcher journal serves as an appropriate data collection tool for a qualitative study because it helps the researcher to (a) reflect on his or her role within the project's context, (b) understand and analyze participants' contributions to the data set, (c) communicate with the participants through a "type of interdisciplinary triangulation of data," and (d) better understand the researcher's "own thinking and reflection patterns" (Janesick, 1999, p. 506).

Keeping a researcher journal was particularly appropriate for this study because it was one that focused on discourse. The researcher journal allowed me to elaborate on what I was seeing and hearing during interviews and throughout my review of the various materials that I collected for my archive. Beyond the benefits that the researcher journal provided me with reflecting on the interviews with principals, the journal also helped me to think more deeply about the archive of documents and materials that I gathered throughout the data collection process. Rapley (2007) explains that field notes “often cover both the ‘successes’ and the ‘failures’ of recruitment and the recording process alongside the gaps in the literature that may appear,” which ultimately leads one to “more themes or questions to ask of [one’s] archive” (p. 126). Through the journaling process, I was able to reflect on the discourse that was created through the “dialogue” between texts and between participants and the texts that they used in their schools, while situating these voices within a greater discourse of evaluation reform.

### **Instrumentation**

I began the research process by completing the human subject research training through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) online training program (Rowan University, 2014). I reached out to the members of the Monmouth University SOE’s Principals’ Academy via email, requesting their participation in the study. I then followed up with interested participants and their districts. First, I gained permission to conduct the study at each district by sending formal requests to the appropriate gatekeepers (Seidman, 2003), including the superintendents and the school principals. Once approved, I contacted each principal via email to move forward with the interview process. Before moving forward with data collection, all participants were provided with

an information sheet, which detailed the parameters of the study and asked participants for their informed consent (see Appendix A for a copy of this form). I ensured that participants understood that their responses to interview questions would remain confidential and that all data with identifiable information would remain protected in secure file folders on a secure server (Rapley, 2007).

**Responsive interviews.** Interviews were conducted with participants over the summer of 2015. Each participant participated in two 30-minute interviews during the data collection phase. I used a semi-structured interview protocol for data collection, which included 14 questions that were developed based on the central research questions for this project. I used what Rubin and Rubin (2012) refer to as the “main-branches-of-a-tree” interview structure, which is when the researcher “divide[s] the research problem into roughly equal parts and plan[s] to cover each part with a main question (a branch)” (p. 124). For this project, the main “branches” or questions focused on three central topics: (a) each principal’s role as “social agent,” (b) his or her use of and responses to “strategies for change” in implementing the Danielson FFT, and (c) his or her retrospective examination of prior experiences in making meaning of present circumstances. As each interview progressed, I asked follow-up questions to ensure that I captured the “depth, detail, vividness, nuance, and richness” of each participant’s responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 124).

Each principal also participated in a follow-up interview lasting approximately 30 minutes in length. In line with the responsive interviewing strategy where questions are tailored or personalized for each participant, questions for the second round of interviews were developed based on each principal’s initial interview and any documents or

materials, which he or she provided for review (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). All interviews were recorded on two audio-recording devices and subsequently transcribed verbatim using Rev.com's transcription services. During each interview, I took notes in my researcher journal, which were organized and expanded immediately after each interview session was completed. See Appendix B for a copy of the interview protocol, which was used with the principals during their initial open-ended interviews.

**Archival materials.** Data for the archive were collected from both public and private sources. Public sources of data included the Danielson Group's website, articles that included interviews with Charlotte Danielson, and the school website for each interview participant's current place of employment. Organizational documents, not readily available to the public, were also collected. At the conclusion of each initial interview with principals, I asked them if they would share any documents or presentation materials that they felt were pertinent to their use or understanding of the Danielson FFT in their setting.

It must be acknowledged, however, that the documents to which I gained access were certainly filtered through the principal's perspective and that some, if not many documents, were excluded based on his or her discretion (Rapley, 2007). It must also be acknowledged that I may not have been aware of some documents by their very omission or exclusion due to sensitive or confidential information regarding evaluations of particular employees. However, this, too, was in line with this project's purpose and research questions, which focused on the principals' critical sensemaking process within the greater technologisation of discourse surrounding teacher evaluations. Analyzing both what the principals shared in addition to identifying any "silences" both within the

documents and among the collective archive gave me a greater sense of the participants' perspectives and allowed me to make comparisons between the participants' stories because "exploring a text often depends as much on *focusing on what is said* – and how a specific argument, idea or concept is developed – as well as *focusing on what is not said* – the silences, gaps or omissions" (Rapley, 2007, p. 111).

As I collected or obtained access to documents and other materials, I organized, labeled, and input the documents into Dedoose, an online application that aids in data organization and analysis. I began preliminarily analyzing the documents and materials during data collection by "arrang[ing] the debates that emerged in these texts into some kind of order to trace the patterns and similarities as well as to spot the moments of disjuncture" (Rapley, 2007, p. 12). This was completed through entries in my researcher journal, where I carefully catalogued the source of each new document or material in addition to reflecting on the archiving process. In order to begin discourse analysis of each piece of the archive, I used a protocol to ask questions of each document or web-based material. See Appendix C for a copy of the protocol I used for this process. The protocol included 10 questions, which like the interview protocol, was developed based on the central research questions for this project.

**Researcher journal.** In addition to using protocols to guide the interviews with principals and to facilitate data collection for the archive, I used a protocol to guide the entries of my researcher journal. The protocol that was used to organize data collection for the archive materials explored Fairclough's (2010) central dimension of discourse, the "text" and the interview protocol focused on the intermediate dimension of discourse, the "discourse practice" and principals' critical sensemaking processes. The researcher

journal protocol helped to further guide data collection of the intermediate dimension in addition to exploring the larger dimension of discourse or “sociocultural practice” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 133). That is, I used the protocol to further explore the “sociocultural practice,” which included exploration on “situational, institutional, [and] societal” levels (Fairclough, 2010, p. 133). The researcher journal protocol was used to capture my reflections on what I was seeing in the data and to guide my reflections on my role as a researcher. In addition, I used the journaling protocol to record the participants’ mannerisms and gestures during the interviews, reflect on the acquisitions process of documents, and make connections or draw comparisons across and between the data sets. See Appendix D for a copy of the 9-question researcher journal protocol.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Data analysis in qualitative research is a continuous process, where the researcher decodes data, finds patterns, and makes meaning in order to explain or describe a social phenomenon (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Data analysis ran concurrently throughout this project as I collected data. As Maxwell (2013) notes, “the experienced qualitative researcher begins data analysis immediately after finishing the first interview or observation, and continues to analyze the data as long as he or she is working on the research, stopping briefly to write report and papers” (p. 104). Because of the very nature of qualitative data analysis, the process was emergent and evolved or changed throughout this project.

**Categorizing strategies.** Maxwell (2013) explains that qualitative data analysis can be divided into two general categories, which include categorizing strategies and connecting strategies. I used both “categorizing” and “connecting strategies” to analyze



the data for this project (Maxwell, 2013). Categorizing strategies are those that break the data into smaller units and focus on similarities between and across data sets out of their original context (Maxwell, 2013). In order to categorize the data for this study, I coded all of the interview transcripts and materials in the archive, moving through at least two iterations, the first of which included a combination of descriptive, process, and versus coding (Saldaña, 2013). In the first iteration, the codes functioned on a primarily organizational level, helping me to see patterns that emerged across my data (Maxwell, 2013). I used descriptive coding in order to classify the data, and this coding helped me to develop “a categorized inventory, tabular account, summary, or index of the data’s contents” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 89). For the interview transcripts, descriptive codes emerged from the data based on participant responses. I also used descriptive codes to categorize the contents of the documents and other materials in the archive, through what Fairclough (2010) terms “description” or analysis of the texts, which exists at the core of the three dimensions of discourse analysis.

In addition to descriptive coding, I used process coding in the first iteration as one of the key components of this study is how the principals’ explained their sensemaking of and interaction with the teacher evaluation model. That is, I was looking to discover more about how the principals explain these “documents-in-use” (Rapley, 2007). Sensemaking is a process by which one makes meaning of new information, an event, or situation (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Weick, 1995), and Fairclough (2010) explains interpretation or “processing analysis” as the analysis of the interaction between the text and the discourse practice. Process coding helped to categorize elements of the principals’ responses that were actionable in terms of their interpretive process. By interviewing principals, I

intended to target this middle or liminal space between discourse practice and texts, focusing on their sensemaking process. Similar to the way in which I used process coding to find the middle ground between text and discourse practice, I also used versus coding in the first iteration. Versus coding was particularly effective because the study took a critical approach (Saldaña, 2013). Versus coding allowed me to identify any binaries or tensions within the participants' interview responses and within the archive materials, in addition to revealing spaces between these forces or binaries.

For the second iteration of coding, I used both pattern and theoretical coding to collapse the first set of codes into fewer codes in order to prepare for the eventual development of key themes (Saldaña, 2013). Maxwell (2013) explains that substantive and theoretical categories for organizing data emerge from the original organizational categories, which are developed within the first iteration of coding. Substantive and theoretical categories were used in order to analyze the data from both my etic perspective as the researcher and to account for the participants' emic perspectives. For the purpose of this study, theoretical coding, and particularly, Fairclough's (2010) conception of the technologisation of discourse were used to analyze the data sets through theoretical categories. Pattern coding was also used to develop substantive categories in order to collapse the data based on participant responses or emergent similarities found among the archive materials. Maxwell (2013) notes that substantive categories are "particularly important for capturing ideas (including participants' ideas) that don't fit into existing organizational or theoretical categories; such substantive ideas may get lost, or never developed, unless they can be captured in such categories" (p. 108).

The two iterations of coding were used in order to place the data into code matrices to find any similarities both within each archive material and interview in addition to exploring patterns across the data sets among the participants' responses and archive materials. After at least two iterations of coding, the codes were then collapsed into key themes, and I develop a codebook to help guide this analysis (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2010; Saldaña, 2013). I completed these steps by imputing the data into Dedoose, and using a variety of tools within the online application to visualize the patterns across the data in multiple ways.

**Connecting strategies.** Beyond categorizing strategies like coding for data analysis, Maxwell (2010) notes the importance of what he terms “connecting strategies” which “operate quite differently from categorizing ones such as coding. Instead of fracturing the initial text into discrete segments and resorting it into categories, connecting analysis attempts to understand the data ... *in context*” (p. 112). The third and most broad dimension of Fairclough's (2010) dimensions of discourse analysis is “explanation” or “social analysis” (p. 133). For this study, the “social analysis” was accomplished by analyzing the space between the principals' understandings (i.e., critical sensemaking) and the greater sociocultural practice, which according to Fairclough (2010) includes understanding on a situational, institutional, and societal level. In order to accomplish this, I interpreted the data in light of current practice, in context with information gathered through a comprehensive literature review and through theory. As this research dealt with transdisciplinarity, it was also fitting that I draw from a variety of disciplines, including literary theory and semiotics, and include what Fairclough (2010) terms both linguistic and interdiscursive analysis. This interdisciplinary or

transdisciplinary practice is what Atkinson and Delamont (2006) suggest makes the research stronger, provided that the tradition of qualitative inquiry is honored and acknowledged.

I maintained a researcher journal, which served as both a data collection and analysis tool as it allowed me to work through emergent ideas and preliminarily analyze my thinking and experiences (Janesick, 1999). More specifically, I used analytical memo writing to critically review the interview transcripts and documents (Colyar, 2009; Saldaña, 2013). Memo writing helped to “not only capture [my] analytic thinking about [my] data, but also *facilitate* such thinking, stimulating analytic insights” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 105).

The journaling process served both an analytic and practical function: “these very practical processes of research, constantly checking out your thoughts hunches with each new piece of ‘data,’ this is a very informal and ad hoc version of the constant comparison method” (Rapley, 2007, p. 127). By journaling, I was able to reflect on the work completed and make decisions on how to move forward. I also found it helpful, however, to share my insights with my community of practice, which provided both a support network and a space in which I could discuss my successes and challenges as I moved through the research process (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The outcomes that emerged from this analysis process were ultimately contextualized in relation to theory, policy, and current practice. The results were then arranged and presented as two manuscripts for potential publication in peer-reviewed journals.

**Rigor**

The data gathered through interviews and archive materials were triangulated to ensure rigor. Triangulation is the process of using various data sources, methods, theoretical schemes, and approaches to find contradictions and convergence among the data (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lather, 1986; Toma, 2006). The data were also triangulated based on the inclusion of responses from multiple participants and through the use of the theoretical framework when analyzing each data set. See Table 1 for a triangulation matrix of data collection techniques.

Table 1

*Triangulation Matrix*

Research Question	Data Source 1 Interviews	Data Source 2 Archive Materials	Data Source 3 Research Journal
What strategies for change have emerged within the discourse of New Jersey's approved teacher evaluation models, and specifically, the Danielson FFT?	The principal's role in implementing "strategies for change" and how he or she responded to external, mandated "strategies for change."	Analysis of the Danielson FFT, the Danielson Group website, and materials from each principal's school to determine how they represent "strategies for change."	Field notes, analytical memos, and reflections while collecting data from the other sources in order to examine the strategies for change across the discourse.
What are the origins of these strategies for change within the Danielson FFT?		Analysis of the Danielson FFT and the Danielson Group's website to determine the origins of the strategy for change.	Field notes, analytical memos, and reflections while collecting the archive materials in order to situate the strategies within the greater sociocultural practice.
How do principals function as "social agents" in promoting the discourse emergent from changes to New Jersey's teacher evaluations?	The principal's role as a mediator between exterior policy changes and their interior school community.	Analysis of Danielson FFT guidelines for administrators and the associated material culture at each school.	Field notes, analytical memos, and reflections on the principals' agency in response to mandated changes.

In order to ensure reliability and trustworthiness of these data analysis techniques, I had to acknowledge and anticipate some of potential threats for this study. Maxwell (2013) identifies two main threats to the validity of a qualitative study, including reactivity and researcher bias. Reactivity is the researcher's influence "on the setting or individuals studied" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 124). This threat was particularly important in

terms of my individual interviews with participants. It was important for me to acknowledge and understand my influence over participants' responses. I counteracted this threat by field testing my interview protocol and avoiding leading questions during the interviews. Researcher bias occurs when the researcher only includes data that confirms his or her preconceived notions or etic perspective going into the research (Maxwell, 2013). For the purpose of this research, it was important that I not only coded the data in terms of my theoretical lens, but that I also considered the data that did not fit within the theoretical boundaries that I initially conceived. I was also aware that some data would even potentially disconfirm the theory that I intended to use for analysis.

In addition, I ensured reliability during this study by first field testing the interview protocol before beginning data collection. I distributed the interview protocol to other current principals, who were not a part of the study and who also use the Danielson FFT in their districts, to ensure that the questions were reliable. After collecting my data, I offered each participant the opportunity to member check their transcripts to ensure that transcripts and written summaries accurately reflected the participants' responses (Creswell, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In addition, my dissertation advisor, who was both familiar with the topic and data analysis procedures, completed an expert review of the protocols used to ensure their reliability.

All of my data were organized by keeping an audit trail, a comprehensive collection of all materials, explanations of theoretical assumptions, and methodologies associated with the study for the purpose of review by an outside researcher (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1984). All identifiable information related to each participant's identity and each school's material culture were protected and remained

confidential in the write up of the project in order to further protect those involved and their respective districts (Rapley, 2007).

### **Researcher's Role**

As a researcher, I have always had a deep interest in examining the power dynamics, tensions, and implicit meanings that are embedded in language. I hold both an undergraduate degree English and education and a master's degree in English, and my prior research and schooling certainly influenced my interest in this dissertation topic. My research interests have primarily focused on the comic book industry, its notorious history for violating the intellectual property rights of writers and artists, and the way in which the study of comic books and graphic novels was entirely excluded from academic study until quite recently. Although this work seems far removed from studying the rhetoric of teacher evaluation in New Jersey, I see my work with the comic book industry and my current role as a high school English teacher as having directly influenced my interest in this dissertation.

In a historical essay that I contributed to Malcolm Mc Neill's (2012) *The Lost Art of Ah Pook is Here: Images from the Graphic Novel*, I chronicled the history of Mc Neill's long collaboration and friendship with American author William Burroughs, focusing on the *Ah Pook* graphic novel project and its eventual incomplete publication. I spent months immersing myself in reading through old contracts, drafts, revisions, legal correspondences, letters, and interviews. While uncovering *Ah Pook*'s story, I also developed the strong belief that there is great value in unpacking meanings that have been established over time. I learned that analyzing language from the past and present can affect the discourse of the future by making others aware of latent power dynamics that



exist in and are perpetuated through language. This core belief is also foundational to my current practice as a high school English teacher. I strive to help my students critically question their surroundings in order to become aware of the ways in which others, particularly those in powerful positions, use their words to exact change or persuade others.

My work and research are often guided by what Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain as the critical theory and social constructivist paradigms. Ontologically, my past research has been guided by historical realism, the belief that reality “was once plastic, but ... was over time, shaped by congeries of social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors, and then crystallized (reified) into a series of structures that are now (inappropriately) taken as ‘real’” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Epistemologically, I believe that people seek to make meaning of the world around them, and that all meaning is socially constructed and value-mediated (Creswell, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I also believe that I must acknowledge my perspective and influence in my roles as both researcher and teacher when presenting my work. Because of my belief that language helps to shape our reality, it is one of my core beliefs that the researcher must acknowledge that he or she is equally subject to the social forces perpetuated by language that he or she is studying among a selected group. Methodologically, I am more comfortable with qualitative research based on my prior experiences. As a result, and as Creswell (2013) explains, my worldview, design, and chosen methodology contributed to an approach for my dissertation that “tend[ed]” to be qualitative in nature (p. 17).

## **Ethical Considerations**

As with any study, a researcher must consider ethics in every aspect of a study's design and implementation (Maxwell, 2013). First and foremost, it is always important for the researcher to ensure that his or her project in no way cause any harm to the participants or nor compromises their confidentiality in any write up or eventual publication (Rapley, 2007). In order to ensure that this study was ethically conducted at all times, I attempted to understand my participants' perspectives in addition to reflecting on my own potential biases and position when making decisions about my study's design (Maxwell, 2013). For this study, I made sure that the participants and key gatekeepers in each of the districts were fully aware of the parameters of the research, what I was exploring, and how I intended to use the data (Rapley, 2007; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). As previously discussed, I intend to provide an information sheet detailing the research project's aim and provide contact information where the participants would be able to reach me at any time throughout the process if they chose not to continue on with the research (Rapley, 2007). It was also important to make clear "who own[ed] the data" throughout the study, and I kept my participants' perspectives in mind by using a process of member checking to ensure that their perspectives were accurately reflected (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 159).

It was also important to consider how I presented myself and the intent of the research at the outset of the study when making initial contact with the districts' gatekeepers so as to avoid misunderstandings or perceived deception of any kind (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). As Rossman and Rallis (2012) explain, reciprocity must be stressed:

Research is a two way street. The researcher wants something: to enter the site freely and to collect data unhindered. The site participants also want something: not to be seriously disturbed in their work or lives and to gain from participating in the study. (p. 157)

By participating in this research, it was my hope that the principals would be able to reflect on their professional role in teacher evaluations and in addition to understanding their use of documents and other associated material culture.

It was also important that I acknowledged the power dynamics, which are implicit in any research. As the researcher in the study, I had to acknowledge my privileged position despite my official job title as a teacher and school staff member, who has less formal authority than a principal. I may have held less legitimate power than the principals whom I interviewed, but I also needed to be cognizant of the power dynamics at play when assuming the researcher's role to ensure ethical interactions with my participants at all times.

Finally, it was important for me to request approval from Rowan University as I was conducting this research as a doctoral candidate at the university. In accordance with Rowan University guidelines, I completed human subject research training as administered through the CITI online training program (Rowan University, 2014). I then completed a Human Research Review Application and submitted it to Rowan's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before moving forward with the research. IRB ensured that this study's purpose, methods, and results were conducted and presented in a manner that was ethical, follows all laws, and did not cause harm to participants (Rowan University, 2014).

In the pages that follow, chapter 4 presents the general findings in light of current literature, theory, and practice. Chapters 5 and 6 are then presented as manuscripts for potential publication, each of which focuses on a different aspect of the findings from the study.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Overview of Findings**

This study sought to discover the principal's role in the greater discourse surrounding teacher evaluation reform, and specifically, how they functioned as social agents in using the Danielson FFT as a strategy for change. The study's findings were drawn from an analysis of data collected from the Danielson Group's website, through interviews with a purposeful sample of principals in one mid-sized New Jersey school district, and various materials that these principals found to be the most crucial in their understanding and use of the Danielson FFT. The research was guided by the three key research questions, which were adapted from Fairclough's (2010) recommendations for CDA of strategies in response to crisis:

1. What strategies for change have emerged within the discourse of New Jersey's approved teacher evaluation models, and specifically, the Danielson FFT?
2. What are the origins of these strategies for change within the Danielson FFT?
3. How do principals function as "social agents" in promoting the discourse emergent from changes to New Jersey's teacher evaluations?

In the pages that follow, I will explain adjustments that I made to this study's theoretical framework and data analysis plan before entering the field. Then, I will present the major findings and conclude with an introduction to chapters 5 and 6, which present two prospective manuscripts for publication.

### **Theoretical Framework and Data Analysis Adjustments**

Based on critical feedback from committee members, I adjusted the theoretical framework and data analysis plan to strengthen the study, both theoretically and

philosophically, to more closely align with tenants of Fairclough's (2010) applications of CDA. As a result, this study did not use Helms Mills et al. (2010) critical sensemaking. Rather, the study was reframed using elements of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and specifically, examined appraisal resources as an alternative way of understanding the Danielson FFT and its use in teacher evaluations. Likewise, data were not analyzed using coding, but rather, were explored grammatically, prosodically or generically, and in terms of social context, reflecting the three levels of realization in language within SFL (Martin & Rose, 2007). Data were analyzed by exploring the ways in which appraisal resources expressed attitudes through affect, judgment, and appreciation in addition to examining the intensity of the attitudes through the system of graduation and for the potential engagement of other voices in the texts (Martin & Rose, 2007). These data analysis procedures, which are described in more detail in chapters 5 and 6, were paired with an exploration of Fairclough's (2010) theory of the technologisation of discourse. The resulting major findings are introduced below.

### **Technologising Teachers: Blurring Lines between Judgment and Appreciation**

Chapter 5 focuses on findings emergent from the first two research questions of this study. The chapter details the results of the appraisal analysis of the Danielson Group's website, focusing on how the pages of the website expressed attitudes regarding values indicative of a greater process of the technologisation of discourse in teacher evaluation reform. The chapter demonstrates how, through appraisal resources, the Danielson Group purported to offer new strategies for change through their FFT, which were indicative of Fairclough's (2010) technologisation of discourse and were based on

neoliberal values such as standardization and objectivity, delivered by outside expert “discourse technologists” (p. 138).

The appraisal resources that were used to describe the value of Charlotte Danielson herself or the consultants, who work for the Danielson Group, were judgment-based, and they represented these expert discourse technologists. Judgment resources are those that are used in order to describe the value of an individual and may be personal (i.e., positive and admiring or negative and criticizing) or moral (i.e., positive and praising or negative and condemning) in nature (Martin & Rose, 2007). The FFT, however, was ironically presented as a tool that school districts and their administrators may have used in order to evaluate their teachers, but judgment was deemphasized in favor of appreciation resources when discussing teacher evaluations. Appreciation resources are those that express the value of things, both concrete and abstract (Martin & Rose, 2007).

The website presented the tool in a more technical way, using appreciation resources to describe teachers’ work and performance, rather than judgment resources to describe the individuals themselves. Charlotte Danielson’s biographical page, for example, explained that she “recognizes the complexity of teaching and the cognitive demands it makes” (Danielson Group, 2013). While Danielson herself was valued or judged based on her extensive knowledge and her position as an “internationally-recognized expert,” teaching became a thing that could be evaluated as separate from the individual doing the teaching. That is, the treatment of things took precedent over the judgment of a teacher’s character, creating a sense of objectivity by using “context-free discourse techniques” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 138). The Danielson Group, in fact,

referenced this concern explicitly on the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) page; however, there was no offer as to how practitioners could actually reconcile between the blurred lines of judgment and appreciation.

The Danielson Group presented the origins of the FFT as a strategy for change in various video clips and on the FAQs page of the website, where Danielson herself answered from a first-person perspective, explaining that the impetus for the FFT's development was that she wanted to define what made "good teaching" (Danielson Group, 2013). The origins of the FFT were appraised or valued for the outsider, "expert" perspective from Danielson, and were expressed through the invocation of a variety of heteroglossic voices, including the work of independent researchers and other, sometimes unnamed, heteroglossic sources that supported the FFT's value.

### **Killing the Metaphor: Principals' Agency and Appraisal of the FFT**

Chapter 6 focuses on the findings emergent from the second and third research questions of this study. Specifically, it explores how one principal in a mid-sized New Jersey school district appraised the FFT and explained his sense of agency as an educational leader in the teacher evaluation change process. Using the technologisation of discourse as a framework for understanding the change process, the chapter demonstrates how the principal's prior experiences informed his current understandings and uses of the Danielson FFT. While chapter 5 is quite critical of the Danielson FFT and the ways in which it perpetuates theoretical changes in the discourse via the technologisation process, chapter 6's findings reveal a more positive perspective on enactments of the discursive changes in practice. More specifically, chapter 6 demonstrates how a principal saw a conversational space opened as a result of resistance and push back against the use of the



FFT and the greater changes to teacher evaluations, a finding that I was not anticipating and one that actually read counter to the literature, which was more critical of neoliberal changes and reforms like those resulting from a technologisation process.

While data were collected from three of the district's principals through responsive interviewing and by collecting the materials that they believed to be the most valuable to them in their implementation of the FFT, the chapter focuses on one principal's experiences and appraisals in order to provide sufficient depth regarding his enactment of the discourse. Below, I provide a summation of all three principals' enactments of the discourse. Collectively, the principals described the origins of the change process, both locally and globally, as emanating from outside of their buildings. They expressed that central office handed down the initiatives to them, and that they had little or no say in selecting the FFT as the teacher evaluation model. All of the principals also agreed that the FFT attempted to standardize the discourse, eliminate biases, and create more objectivity in the teacher evaluation process. However, the ways in which they positively or negatively appraised the value of the FFT, represented the staff that they were responsible for leading, and characterized their social agency in the change process differed widely. These similarities and differences were expressed in both interviews and selected documents through their (1) often interchangeable use of judgment and appreciation resources to describe teachers and evaluations, (2) invocation of heteroglossic voices from teachers and fellow administrators, and (3) use of metaphors to amplify their attitudes.

**Push the boundaries and save the metaphor.** The first principal, who referred to himself as a “push-the-boundaries kind of person,” had worked in the education for more than 20 years, including over 10 years working as a high school English teacher. This principal’s enactment of the discourse served as the foundation of the article presented in chapter 5. Throughout his interview, he characterized himself as a teacher and a principal, often invoking the heteroglossic voices of teachers now under his supervision to echo or reiterate some of the frustrations he himself had with the FFT. Unlike his fellow colleagues, he was more skeptical of the changes. Although he explained that the intentions and origins of such changes were likely not “ill-intentioned” and his appraisal was generally positive, he expressed concerns about the “quantification” of the discourse, which was killing “the metaphors” and discounting the “human element” of teaching, which resulted in “losing the art.” His appraisals of the FFT often wavered between positive and negative, switching between judgment and appreciation resources. He described the changes as a struggle, ultimately coming down to a “question of whether you have to be authentic to the tool or authentic to what you’re credentialed and licensed to do.” His selection of materials also demonstrated his propensity for art and metaphor, one of which was a document he distributed to his staff entitled, “The Danielson Guide to a Highly Effective Thanksgiving” (2015), a satirical piece on the FFT with outrageous examples of what four different Thanksgiving meals would look like as evaluated by the FFT.

**Mary Sunshine and the plight of the report card.** The second principal, who explained that she was dubbed by her superintendent as “Mary Sunshine,” appraised the FFT very positively. Prior to becoming a public school principal, she worked as an

administrator for 11 years in a Catholic school, where there was what she described as “no instrument” to complete teacher evaluations. She explained the FFT as “less subjective” with expectations that were “so clear,” repeatedly using the metaphor that it offered teachers an “even playing field.” Unlike her “push-the-boundaries” colleague, she often characterized teachers as a separate group, but also included their heteroglossic voices to express concerns over the symbolic and metaphorical significance attached to numerical values associated with teacher evaluations. She explained that she wished “they did a 7-point scale or something that was not so connected to education” because the FFT’s 4-tier rubric and New Jersey’s associated 4.0 rating system were symbolically associated with a 4.0 grading scale in a school setting. Through a mixture of judgment and appreciation terminology, she explained how the numbers became “very emotional” for teachers. Based on her prior experience working in a context without a standard teacher evaluation model and on her assessment of the metaphorical significance of numbers, it was particularly telling that she selected a composite score report and example evaluation, complete with her comments to justify the scores, as most valuable in her understanding of the FFT.

**“Share the word”: The Danielson fan.** The third principal, who described herself as a “fan” of Danielson and the FFT, explained her prior experience as working in a variety of administrative roles before becoming the principal in her current context. Teacher evaluation reform was beneficial because it was now more comparable to practices in the “business” world. She, too, invoked the heteroglossic voices of teachers; however, she often referenced the resistance she found among her staff when implementing the changes rather than empathizing with their potential anxieties. Like her

colleagues, she similarly switched between the use of judgment and appreciation resources to describe teachers, their evaluations, and the FFT. As a self-described “fan,” this principal explained that she would like to see the FFT expanded and was enthusiastic about what Danielson, as an expert, had to offer. She wanted to “share the word” with her staff, a phrasing that invoked an almost religious connotation. She, too, referenced the “report card” metaphor to describe the teacher evaluation model; however, she explained that only the “bright ones” among her staff “caught on to the math.” Her selected valuable material was the updated 2013 version of the FFT, which she explained provided “more specifics” for those teachers, who “need a little work.”

### **Potential Future Publications**

For future publication, the manuscripts may potentially be submitted to *Discourse Studies* and *Teachers College Record* with Dr. Johnson as the co-author. Chapter 5’s heavy theoretical focus on the technologisation of discourse and critical examination of the Danielson Group’s website lends itself to *Discourse Studies* while Chapter 6, which focuses both theoretically and pragmatically on the application of new teacher evaluation policies, is more suitable for submission to *Teachers College Record*.

## Chapter 5

### **The Danielson Group's (Web)Site of Technologisation: An Appraisal Analysis of Teacher Evaluation Strategies for Change**

The purpose of this study was to explore the Danielson Group's website and their promotion of the FFT as a strategy for change in response to widespread calls for education reforms. These movements sought to ameliorate a perceived crisis in education, helping to prepare students to compete in the globalized, competitive workforce market of the future. The Danielson Group, a private company, has become a key player through the widespread use of the FFT by districts across the country in order to comply with new mandates, some of which focused on teacher evaluation policies and procedures. Using a dialectical-relational approach to CDA as a strategy of inquiry, this study demonstrated how, through an appraisal analysis, the Danielson Group purported to offer new strategies for change through their FFT on their website, a process that was indicative of Fairclough's (2010) technologisation of discourse. The findings demonstrated how the Danielson Group functioned as an outside expert able to support new discursive techniques for teacher evaluations, changing both the people and the practice through the technologisation process.

The recent economic recession, increased unemployment, and the housing crisis in the United States have made many people more conscious about how education correlates with economic interests. Students and their families have been transformed into "consumers" of their education within a global economy (Gabbard & Atkinson, 2007; Gilbert, 2011; Giroux, 2010; Larsen, 2005; Lonsbury & Apple, 2012; Tienken, 2013). Yet, the rhetoric regarding the current crisis facing schools is actually not a new phenomenon and not even one that is limited to the United States (Cochran-Smith, 2005;

Gilbert, 2011; Giroux, 2010; Lonsbury & Apple, 2012; Pini & Gorostiaga, 2008). Rather, crisis has provided a context for school reform movements for some time, and “these perspectives blame public schools for the declining of USA international competitiveness, rarely taking into account how social inequality impacts student learning” (Pini & Gorostiaga, 2008, p. 431).

Many education reform initiatives, in both the United States and abroad, have focused on improving teacher quality through new teacher evaluation policies (Gilbert, 2011; Lathan, 2011; Pini & Gorostiaga, 2008). In the United States, the Obama administration’s RTTT initiative has continued the trend of increased federal involvement in education reform efforts targeted at teacher quality and effectiveness, which began with the Bush administration’s NCLB program and the requirement for all teachers to become highly qualified (Koppich & Esch, 2012; Lonsbury & Apple, 2012; McGuinn, 2012). The context of crisis has helped to shift the power dynamics in schools across the country as more federal and state officials have increasingly more control with the implementation of new reforms (Gittell & McKenna, 1999; Kirst, 2004; Koppich & Esch, 2012; McGuinn, 2011).

When a perceived crisis sparks a disruption of the status quo, it becomes necessary to examine the strategies for change intended to ameliorate the given problems “because strategies have a strongly discursive character: they include imaginaries for change and for new practices and systems, and they include discourse, narratives and arguments which interpret, explain and justify the area of social life they are focused upon ...” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 18). The purpose of this study was to explore one such strategy for change to teacher evaluation procedures and policies. In recent years, the

Danielson Group, a private company, has become a key player in teacher evaluation reform movements in the United States. According to the Danielson Group's website, the FFT "has become the most widely used definition of teaching in the United States, and has been adopted as the single model, or one of several approved models, in over 20 states" (Danielson Group, 2013). The FFT has been used as a way to amend the perceived crisis in education. Using Fairclough's (2010) technologisation of discourse as a theoretical framework and CDA as a strategy of inquiry, this study critically examined the Danielson Group's company website, in order to explore its narrative regarding teachers, the profession as a whole, and the values that the company promotes within the broader context of neoliberal education reform.

### **Theoretical Framework**

**(Re)structuring power and neoliberal education reform.** Beginning in the 1970s, neoliberal ideology increasingly gained popularity in various areas of the public sector, including education. Norman Fairclough, a preeminent scholar in CDA studies, has focused much of his work on the influence of neoliberal ideology in capitalistic societies. In the introduction to his *Critical Discourse Analysis: A Critical Study of Language*, he explained the far-reaching influence of neoliberalism into a variety of fields, including education:

The capitalism of what we call the 'neo-liberal' era has been characterized by, among other things, 'free markets' (the freeing of markets from state intervention and regulation), and attempts at reducing the state's responsibility for providing social welfare. It has involved a *restructuring* of relations between the economic, political, and social domains, including the extension of markets into social

domains such as education, and focusing the role of the state and government on strengthening markets and competitiveness. (Fairclough, 2010, p. 11)

Education has been increasingly redefined by values, which emphasize accountability, quality control, standards, and performance, and this has led to reform initiatives and policy changes in an increasingly neoliberal landscape (Gabbard & Atkinson, 2007; Gilbert, 2011; Giroux, 2010; Larsen, 2005; Lonsbury & Apple, 2012; Spillane & Kenney, 2012; Tienken, 2013). With the creation of systems and procedures that were based on free-market principles, neoliberalism arguably became a hegemonic ideal and framework through which many have come to understand the value of education (Harvey, 2005; Tienken, 2013).

One of the characteristic qualities of neoliberal policies and reforms became what Harvey (2005) referred to as the “fetish belief” in improvements via technological change. He wrote that the “theory of technological change relies upon coercive powers of competition to drive the search for new products, new production methods, and new organizational forms” (p. 68). Technological change and innovation would allow for the formation of global networks to support financial growth and sound businesses both in the United States and abroad. What was good for business was good for the state, which led to an increase in the search for new technology, interventions of outside or elite experts in times of crisis, placement of the interests of the individual before the collective group, and the creation of partnerships between public and private entities (Harvey, 2005). These trends toward structuring and monitoring practice through the use of new technologies and promoting the value of the free market were and continue to be



important for scholars to consider as education is more readily viewed through a framework that often quantifies the quality of students' and educators' work.

**Technologisation of discourse.** Contemporaneously with the rise in popularity of neoliberal ideology during the 1970s, Michel Foucault increasingly addressed the influence of “technologies” or “techniques” in his work in a much broader sense beyond the simple pragmatic applications of new tools, systems, or machines to improve operations or communications. For Foucault, technologies were “the ways in which modern social and political systems control, supervise, and manipulate populations as well as individuals,” and he used the term in order to explore the power dynamics inherent in various systems that carried “professions of neutrality” (Behrent, 2013, p. 55). That is, Foucault sought to explore how seemingly innocuous systems were in fact anything but neutral, modes through which some could maintain power and control.

Foucault's work and his conception of technologies as instruments of power and control directly influenced much of Fairclough's (2010) work, and specifically influenced his theory of the technologisation of discourse, which he defined as “a process of intervention in the sphere of discourse practices with the objective of constructing a new hegemony in the order of discourse of the institution or organization concerned...” (p. 137). The technologisation of discourse represented how power structures may be reworked within a discourse community or field of study. These discursive changes represented strategies for change, where new structures or technologies were thereby realized in the discourse through an introduction of voices promoting new practices, new ways of controlling or monitoring these practices within the discourse, and ultimately controlling their perpetuation and future use.

Fairclough (2010) described five characteristics of the technologisation of discourse, the first of which was “the emergence of expert ‘discourse technologists,’” who were described as “expert[s] or consultant[s] with privileged access to scientific information, and their interventions into discursive practice therefore carry the aura of ‘truth’” (p. 138). These discourse technologists often emerged from outside of the profession or immediate context. Recent changes to teacher evaluation policies across the country have led to the emergence of a variety of private companies who have become “experts” in the design and dissemination of new teacher evaluation models in this vein. The Danielson Group became one of the most popular choices among school districts across the country as they implemented new teacher evaluation policies and procedures. The Danielson Group offers a variety of services and products to its prospective customers, some of which were provided free of charge while others required purchase. Their offerings included on-site workshops and training, webinars, DVDs, books, and other materials to accompany implementation of their FFT for teacher evaluations.

The second characteristic is “a shift in the policing of discourse practices” which was “from a local institutional level to a transinstitutional level, and from categories of agent within particular institutions (be it education, law, medicine) to discourse technologists as outsiders” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 139). In recent years, and particularly since the RTTT initiative, state agencies and officials have gained more power in influencing district-level initiatives (Gittell & McKenna, 1999; Henig, 2009; Kirst, 2004; McGuinn, 2011; Mokher, 2010; Shober, 2012). Not only was there a “policing” and standardizing practice with these new teacher evaluation models that lessened local school governance control, but the discourse was also overtly focused on “outsiders” and

borrowed from business models and management practices. Likewise, the third characteristic of the technologisation of discourse included “techniques to be increasingly designed and projected as ‘context-free,’ as usable in any relevant context” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 139). This, Fairclough (2010) explained, was an example of colonization of the local discourse by the “outside.” The standardized and objective measures of new teacher evaluation methods were often touted as applicable in a wide-range of settings.

Fairclough (2010) described the fourth and fifth characteristics of the technologisation of discourse as “strategically motivated simulation in discourse” and “pressure towards standardization of discourse practice” (p. 138). The use of managerial and business model language and the overall quantification of teacher evaluation scores certainly reflected this element of the technologisation of discourse, and the changing landscape of teacher evaluation was characterized by an increasing emphasis on market values, managerialism, and neoliberal ideologies throughout education policy reform (Giroux, 2010; Koppich & Esch, 2012; Larsen, 2005; Lonsbury & Apple, 2012; Pini & Gorostiaga, 2008; Tienken, 2013). Simulation was “the conscious and systematic grafting onto a discourse technique of discourse practices originating elsewhere, on the basis of a strategic calculation of their effectivity” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 139). That is, technologisation of discourse suggested not only that the content or message of the discourse changed, but even the way in which it was conveyed through a particular medium or method.

In the pages that follow, Fairclough’s (2010) five characteristics of the technologisation of discourse provided a theoretical framework through which this study explored the Danielson Group’s website within the context of a greater neoliberal policy

environment because of the Danielson Group's tremendous influence in this area. The FFT has become one of the most widely used teacher evaluation models in many states across the country (McGuinn, 2012), and the Danielson Group has become a key technologist in the discursive change process. This study focused on how the pages of their website expressed attitudes regarding the changing values in teacher evaluation reform. It demonstrates how, through appraisal resources, the Danielson Group purported to offer new strategies for change through their FFT, which were indicative of Fairclough's (2010) technologisation of discourse and were based on neoliberal values such as standardization and objectivity, delivered by outside expert "discourse technologists" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 138).

## **Methods**

**Research design and strategy of inquiry.** This study employed CDA as a strategy of inquiry, and specifically used Fairclough's (2010) dialectical-relational approach. CDA has been considered a "heterogeneous school," which "allows for continuous debates, for changes in the aims and goals, and for innovation" (Wodak & Meyer, 2013, p. 5). CDA has been used as a strategy of inquiry in educational research for some time, and it has been used to explore a wide range of topics, including those associated with policy, practice, and theory (Rogers, 2011; Rogers et al., 2005). CDA has also been used as a strategy of inquiry to specifically explore topics associated with teacher evaluation policies around the world, the instruments associated with teacher evaluation, definitions of teacher quality in both k-12 and higher education contexts, and both media and policy documents' representations of teachers in both the United States and abroad (Caughlan & Jiang, 2014; Cohen, 2010; Crebbin, 1997; Pini & Gorostiaga,

2008; Sternod, 2011; Taylor, 2004; Thomas, 2003, 2005, 2011). Recently, CDA has also been increasingly used to examine electronic communications and discourse (Luke, 2002), and specifically, researchers have used CDA to investigate websites, including those used for educational purposes or those used by educational institutions (Amare, 2007; Agustina, 2013; Gabel et al., 2015; Hoang, Rojas-Lizana, & Wang, 2015; Jawitz & Williams, 2015; McNamara, Fealy, & Geraghty, 2012).

The variability of the methods among CDA researchers is suggestive of its underlying philosophy, and even though the approaches to CDA are quite varied, there are several characteristics that are central to this strategy of inquiry. All CDA is problem-oriented and interested in “de-mystifying ideologies and power through the systematic and *retroductable* investigation of semiotic data” (Wodak & Meyer, 2013, p. 3). In addition, it is important that the researcher reflect on and outline his or her position, interests, and potential biases throughout the research process: “CDA researchers have to be aware that their own work is driven by social, economic and political motives like any other academic work and that they are not in any privileged position” (Wodak & Meyer, 2013, p. 7). Because the study took a critical approach and sought to examine the discursive change processes associated with teacher evaluation reform, it necessitated that I carefully examined my roles as a researcher and current public school teacher, who was both subject to these changes and evaluated based on the Danielson FFT. Additionally, it was essential that I remained reflective on how these power structures impacted my work and how my position also impacted my examination of them.

A Faircloughian approach to CDA is one of many approaches and is based on principles of SFL, which differs from other linguistic analytical traditions because it is

“profoundly concerned with the relationship between language and other elements and aspects of social life...” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 5). Based on the extensive work of Michael Halliday, SFL is a semiotic study of language and functional grammar, which explores sign systems on a lexico-grammatical, discursive, and greater social level (Eggins, 2004; Fairclough, 2010; Halliday & Mattheissen, 2014; Martin & Rose, 2007). SFL, and by extension, Fairclough’s CDA is based on an understanding that:

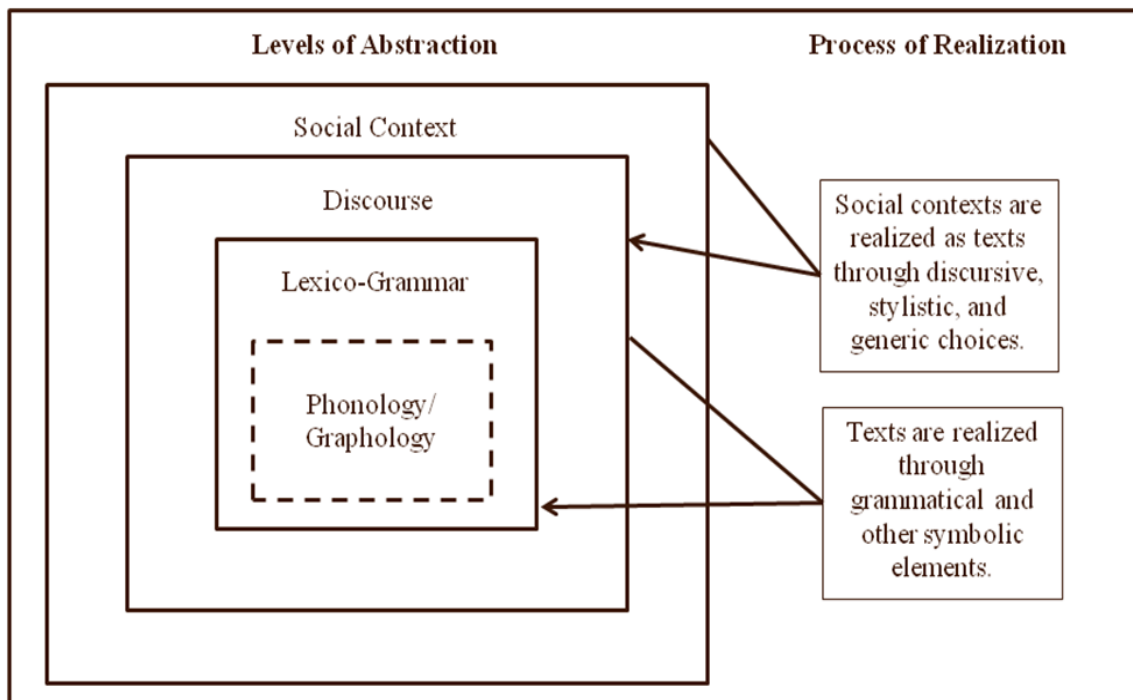
[T]he world is not out there as some absolute, determined reality simply to be labeled (and therefore talked about) in only one possible way. Reality is constructed through the oppositions included in the semiotic systems of the language we use. (Eggins, 2004, p. 18)

Fairclough’s approach to CDA bridges the gap between “text analysis and social research” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 7) and draws upon principles of SFL, but attempts to steer away from the technical jargon of linguistics, and instead, focuses more on the social relationships that we share through language. There are three interconnected elements that comprise the realization of social practice, and these include genres or “ways of acting,” discourses or “ways of representing,” and styles or “ways of being” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 26). The social contexts in which we live are realized through various texts in the discourse through the use of different discursive, stylistic, and generic choices and conventions, which in turn, are realized through lexico-grammatical and other symbolic systems that make up this discourse (Eggins, 2004; Martin & Rose, 2007).<sup>2</sup> Discourse is

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<sup>2</sup> Lexico-grammar can further be divided into an examination of expressions of phonology and graphology, but for the purposes of this study, I focused exclusively on the three levels or strata of language realization as represented in figure 2. It must also be noted that texts are defined broadly beyond the written word. An examination of texts also includes visual texts, which can be read and are realized or symbolized through a visual grammar of color, composition, and other stylistic elements.

both concrete and abstract; it is a process by which the social context is represented and is a product of this process. The levels or strata of language realization and the interaction of discourse, genre, and style are represented in figure 2. The boxes on the left represent levels of abstraction with each inner layer more abstract than the last. The processes of realization or “symbolization” are represented on the right (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 5).



*Figure 2.* A representation of the levels or strata of discourse and associated processes of realization, incorporating genre, style, and discourse.

Fairclough’s (2010) iterative and cyclical four-stage dialectical-relational approach to CDA begins with a “focus upon a social wrong in its semiotic aspect” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 235). First, one must select a topic that addresses a “social wrong” that “can productively be approached in a transdisciplinary way” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 235). What constitutes a “social wrong” is wide-ranging, and for the purpose of this

research, the larger “social wrong” is what has been dubbed a “crisis” facing public education. Teacher evaluation reform has become a way of ameliorating the crisis. The semiotic aspects of this topic arose through the discourse associated with these strategies for change, and this research specifically focuses on the Danielson Group’s presentation of the FFT on their website. While teacher evaluation reform and a study of the Danielson FFT may not seem like a “social wrong” that overtly impacts one’s well-being, the reform movement and subsequent evaluation frameworks are in response to what has been presented as a major crisis. This research was guided by the following essential questions, which were adapted from Fairclough’s (2010) recommendations for CDA of strategies in response to crisis:

1. What strategies for change have emerged within the discourse of approved teacher evaluation models, and specifically, the Danielson FFT?
2. What are the origins of these strategies for change within the Danielson FFT?

**Data collection.** The data were collected from the Danielson Group’s website pages, accessible through their homepage (<http://www.danielsongroup.org>), and they were accessed during the summer and fall of 2015. Because the very nature of online content is not static, it must be acknowledged that this study represented what Pauwels (2012) refers to as a “snapshot” of the discursive elements of the website; it was a “static slice of a dynamic medium at a certain point in time” (p. 251). It should, however, also be noted that the Danielson Group’s website remained virtually unchanged over the course of the data collection and analysis for this study. For the purposes of this study, data were collected and analyzed from all of the pages under the Danielson Group’s domain name (<http://www.danielsongroup.org>). While this study did examine the various third-party



links included on the Danielson Group's website, such as press releases and research studies focusing on the FFT, collection and analysis focused exclusively on those pages hosted under the primary domain name firstly because of their creation and maintenance by the Danielson Group, and secondly, because of their direct association with the company's name and identity in their web address.

The rationale for focusing on the Danielson Group's website for this project was twofold. First, websites may be considered "unique expressions of contemporary culture, and as such they constitute a huge repository of potential data about contemporary ways of doing and thinking of large groups of people across ethnic and national boundaries" (Pauwels, 2012, p. 247). The Danielson Group's website represented the virtual face of the company, accessible in the public domain, by prospective users and consumers of their products and services. This study's focus on the Danielson Group's website and their promotion of the FFT, one of the most widely used and approved teacher evaluation models under the new mandates (McGuinn, 2012), certainly qualified it as what Wodak and Meyer (2013) would refer to as a "typical text" based on its widespread popularity among school districts across the country. This topic may also be considered what Fairclough (2010) described as "productive" as "there are significant semiotic features of the topic which have not been sufficiently attended to in existing social research" (p. 235). To date, the company's website has not been examined for the role it played in the discourse.

**Data analysis: Discourse systems and appraisal.** The pages of the website were explored grammatically, prosodically or generically, and in terms of social context, reflecting the three levels of realization in language within SFL (Martin & Rose, 2007).

This was accomplished through an appraisal analysis. Within SFL, there are three metafunctions of language, which include the interpersonal, ideational, and textual (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Martin & Rose, 2007). Metafunctions are realized through patterns of meaning or discourse systems, one of which is appraisal (Martin & Rose, 2007). Because this study sought to discover the Danielson Group's presentation of their FFT as a "strategy for change" in addition to exploring the origins of this change, the analysis focused on the use of appraisal resources. The discourse system of appraisal is part of the interpersonal metafunction of language, which is "language as action" and is both "interactive and personal" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 30).

Appraisal resources are used to achieve this interpersonal metafunction by enacting meaning. That is, appraisal is "concerned with evaluation – the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced and readers aligned" (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 25). The Danielson Group's FFT was a strategy for change to ameliorate perceived weaknesses in current teacher evaluation procedures and improve teaching practices, and this study explored how the Danielson Group assigned value to their strategy on their website for an audience of educational professionals, who were ostensibly their prospective customers. Appraisal analysis was fitting for this study because it sought to explore evaluation on both a textual and meta-textual level; it explored the Danielson Group's evaluation of teacher evaluation procedures.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For the sake of clarity, the word "evaluation" was used exclusively when referring to "teacher evaluation" policies or procedures throughout the findings and discussion of this article. References to the appraisal analysis are described in terms of the expression of attitudes and refer directly to affect, judgment, appreciation, graduation, and engagement.

The key resources of appraisal include affect, judgment, and appreciation. Affect is an expression of feelings, which can be both concrete or abstract and positive or negative (Martin & Rose, 2007). Judgment resources are those that are used in order to describe the value of an individual and may be personal (i.e., positive and admiring or negative and criticizing) or moral (i.e., positive and praising or negative and condemning) in nature (Martin & Rose, 2007). Finally, appreciation resources are those that express the value of things, both concrete and abstract (Martin & Rose, 2007). Attitudes expressed in an appraisal may be “amplified” or “hedged” through the system of “graduation” by increasing or decreasing the force and focus of the appraisal (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 25). Additionally, an appraisal may be represented as coming exclusively from the speaker (monoglossic), or through the invocation of others’ voices (heteroglossia) through the process of engagement (Martin & Rose, 2007).

For this study, I analyzed the pages of the website by first “arrang[ing] the debates that emerged in these texts into some kind of order to trace the patterns and similarities as well as to spot the moments of disjuncture” (Rapley, 2007, p. 12). The data were organized and input into Dedoose, an online application that aids in data organization and analysis. I analyzed the pages to explore the ways in which appraisal resources expressed attitudes through affect, judgment, and appreciation in addition to examining the intensity of the attitudes through the system of graduation and for the potential engagement of other voices in the texts (Martin & Rose, 2007). I used analytical memo writing to accompany this process and critically review the data (Saldaña, 2013). Analytical memo writing was used to “not only capture [my] analytic thinking about [my] data, but also *facilitate* such thinking, stimulating analytic insights” (Maxwell,

2013, p. 105). More specifically, I used memo writing to interpret the data through genre, discourse, and style by exploring the data, in terms of generic conventions (genre), through study's theoretical framework (discourse), and through prosodic patterns in the use of appraisal resources (style). Throughout the study, I also kept a research journal to reflect on the research process, researcher assumptions, and work through emergent ideas (Janesick, 1999).

## **Findings**

The findings of an appraisal analysis of the Danielson Group's website are presented below in light of Fairclough's (2010) technologisation of discourse. Each section details how the Danielson Group's website expressed one of the five elements of the theoretical framework through appraisal resources. Specifically, the findings focused on how the Danielson Group valued objectivity, evidence collection, and systematic use of their framework in teacher evaluations, which were realized through the use of appreciation resources to describe teachers' work and performance rather than judgment resources to describe the individuals themselves. Through an analysis of the website in terms of genre, discourse, and style, the findings showed how judgment and appreciation resources were sometimes conflated or recontextualized, blurring the lines between appraisals of teachers as individuals and the things or artifacts that represented evidence of their work, a representation of what Martin and Rose (2007) described as the "border of character and value (of judgment and appreciation)" (p. 39).

**The emergence of expert discourse technologists.** Fairclough (2010) noted that the expert discourse technologists were distinguishable by two features, the first of which was that the knowledge they brought to an organization "carr[ied] an aura of 'truth'"

because of their “privileged access to scientific information” (p. 138). The Danielson Group website featured information about Charlotte Danielson, the founder and namesake of the company, under the first navigation tab in the website’s header. The tab, labeled “About,” featured biographical information about Danielson’s education, background, and publications. The content clearly fit the generic conventions of a biographical summary as it positively judged her background and experience, giving her credibility as an expert discourse technologist. Interestingly, however, the tabular label of “About” was essentially used as a preposition in the webpage’s design with three sections listed below, including “Charlotte Danielson” first, followed by “Consultants,” and “Mission.” The use of the word “About” here and information included in the linked pages suggested that Danielson and the other consultants embodied the meaning of the Danielson Group as “expert technologists.”

The biographical information on the “Charlotte Danielson” page described her first as a “former economist” and “an internationally-recognized expert in the area of teacher effectiveness” in the first paragraph. While the biographical page did note her experience within the education field in the final paragraph, including teaching at “all levels, kindergarten through university,” her role as having expertise outside of the education profession was emphasized. Danielson’s work as an “economist” and “internationally-recognized expert” were referenced first and functioned as a positive judgment of her as a person, its grammatical construction focusing on and emphasizing her identity as an outsider, how she “*is* a former economist” (emphasis added). Her experiences in education, however, were grammatically situated as aspects of her career that could be appraised: she “*has* taught” and “*has* worked as a curriculum director and

staff development director” (emphasis added). The page, therefore, primarily judged Danielson positively for her outsider perspective, providing her with “privileged access to information,” which she could use to improve the discourse (Fairclough, 2010, p. 138). The positive judgment of her international acclaim invoked the heteroglossic voices of unnamed others, who likewise recognized her as an “expert,” which related to the second characteristic of expert discourse technologists, who “hold accredited roles associated with accredited practices and routines in the institutions, either as direct employees or as expert consultants brought in from the outside for particular projects” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 138). Danielson’s outside expertise was emphasized and appraised positively in order to bolster her ethos as a credible, legitimate source for teacher evaluation reform because she was described as a revered expert on teacher evaluation methods and quality control with experience in the private sector.

When examined prosodically or through an analysis of the “pattern of appraisal choices [that] construct[ed] the ‘stance’ or ‘voice’ of the appraiser...” (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 59), this page was quite subjective in its positive judgment of Danielson’s outsider work, but it presented her work within education through appraisal resources and emphasized the teaching practice rather than the person, creating a sense of objectivity and separation between the person and his or her work within that context. The content of her publications were presented objectively and as tools through which education practitioners may find their teaching practice appreciate in value. Specifically, her framework book was described as “defining good teaching,” a positive appraisal, and Danielson was described as “specializing in the design of teacher evaluation systems that both ensuring teacher quality and promote professional learning.” The FFT likewise was

construed as a tool to measure and promote things (“teacher quality” and “professional learning”), described in terms of appreciation. However, the descriptions of Danielson herself emphasized a judgment of her character, particularly in terms of personal judgment or admiration, all of which supported her credibility. It was this very objectivity that created the “aura of truth,” by which one may have trusted her and her FFT to make an unbiased assessment of teacher quality.

**A shift in the policing of discourse practices.** The second characteristic of the technologisation of discourse was a shift in the policing of discourse practices. Fairclough (2010) noted that the shift is one of both “location” and of “legitimacy” (p. 139). These policing technologists were not agents within a particular institution, but rather, were outsiders on a “transinstitutional level” and their policing was legitimized based on objectivity, “the grounds of science, knowledge, and truth” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 139). This shift in policing and legitimation based on objectively defined terms was represented in the Danielson Group’s mission statement.

Listed as an additional page under the “About” tab on their website, the mission statement read as follows: “The Danielson Group seeks to advance the understanding and application of Charlotte Danielson’s concepts in the educational community, connect them to other areas of knowledge, and enhance the professional practices of educators to positively impact student learning.” The statement included three areas of focus, the first of which aimed to further Charlotte Danielson’s concepts within the education community. Although her biographical page listed educational experience in her background, she was characterized as an outsider with experience in other fields, namely economics. The concepts were labeled possessively as “Charlotte Danielson’s,” which

suggested her ownership over them as an outside, expert discourse technologist. The syntax of the sentence placed emphasis on this ownership, shifting the policing of the discourse away from the local level to something that could be better directed by an outside group. That is, the discourse practices were constructed possessively as belonging to Danielson herself, and she and the collective Danielson Group necessarily had a degree of jurisdiction over them. Danielson and her concepts were also given primacy in the order of the clauses over the other elements of the mission statement, which were to “connect” the concepts in order to “enhance” professional practices. The mission statement ended with the ultimate goal of achieving a “positive impact” on student learning, a term which suggested a post-positivist perspective and objectivity, further giving the Danielson Group legitimacy through the “aura of truth” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 138).

Fully understanding and applying the concepts of the FFT required help of expert discourse technologists. The FFT was explained under the “Framework” tab on the company’s website. The domains were presented objectively, dividing teaching practice into quantifiable “domains” and “components.” The syntax was even presented objectively, where the number of components took precedent in the sentence structure earlier on the page: “The complex activity of teaching is divided into 22 components (and 76 smaller elements) clustered into four domains.” Syntactically and visually, the information was presented in nested sections, an appeal to the audience’s sense of logos. The audience included potential customers, who have worked within the field and would likely have agreed with the “complex” nature of the profession. The task of teacher



evaluation may have appeared less daunting for potential evaluators while also acknowledging that the craft could not be oversimplified.

The framework was also described using various intensifiers to suggest its effectiveness. It was described as being useful for “many purposes” and practitioners could become “more thoughtful” through its use. Its value was defined through a sharpening of the focus on the specificity of the domain components, which were described as “distinct” and “specific.” A final paragraph suggested training by the Danielson Group was “highly recommended” for “all” professionals, intensifiers which compelled the audience to think of not only the necessity for such a tool, but also the need for help from outside discourse technologists to facilitate its policing. The page ended with a statement that “Official Danielson Group consultants carry our business card.” Syntactically, this statement placed emphasis on the attitudinal lexis of “official” and the presence or potential threat of its binary, “unofficial” consultants, who could lead potential customers astray. Yet, they could be assured that the Danielson Group’s consultants were professionals with “business cards,” a marker, which was lent value and legitimacy from the private sector. These outsider discourse technologists were necessary to ensure proper “policing” of the new discourse when using the FFT for teacher evaluations.

**Emergence of context-free discourse techniques.** The third characteristic of the technologisation of discourse was the emergence of techniques for modifying the discourse, which were often “evident in training, where there is a focus upon the transferability of skills” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 139). The Danielson Group’s homepage design emphasized how they may have provided what Fairclough (2010) referred to as

“context-free” discourse techniques to their prospective customers (p. 139). The company’s banner read, “Promoting Effective Teaching and Professional Learning.” The use of the transitive verb “promoting” here was one that connoted both education terminology (advancing students to the next level) but also business-oriented values (advancing the sale of a product). Words like “effective” and “professional” positively appraised the words “teaching” and “learning.” The homepage’s composition suggested that teaching and learning may have been advanced or improved through the use of organization’s services, FFT, and resources, each of which were represented by an iconic image underneath the company’s slogan.

Aesthetically, these circular images visually connected to both the company’s logo in the top right corner of the page and to an image of the leading discourse technologist, whose picture is featured prominently at the bottom of the page, the only photographic image included in the layout. Symbolically, the association with the FFT with an iconic image of three books provided a positive visual appraisal by alluding to its academic quality. The homepage’s minimalistic style in both phrasing and design allowed potential customers to see the company’s offerings as context-free. Underneath the company’s logo, the page presented a question in bold letters: “Interested in our services?” to which they provided a solution: “The Danielson Group offers professional development workshops and consulting services for all members of your organization.” The services were applicable and beneficial for “all” members of not just any organization, but “your” organization, the use of the second-person here suggesting personalization and applicability for each prospective consumer.

The “Services” page of the website elaborated further on the company’s offerings. In the introductory material at the top of the page, the Danielson Group explained that the group “provides professional development opportunities to states, districts, and schools,” and the inclusion of all three general contexts related the applicability of their services to a variety of settings. Additionally, the group was described as consisting of consultants, who were judged positively as being of the “highest caliber,” and were described as having “experience in educational practice, leadership, and research.” That is, the group was an embodiment of the technologists (consultants), upon which their value as an organization was based. The introduction ends, noting that they provided a “wide array” of services, positively appraising their offerings through amplification, and their applicability spanned the immediate context to include customers in both “United States and abroad.” The Danielson Group presented their discourse techniques and the FFT as “context-free” in a way that potential customers could see how they could benefit their schools locally, but also how they were something that were beneficial globally. This was an appraisal that gained value through its association within the greater context of education reform movements, where schools in the US were increasingly compared with others around the world in a competitive, globalized education market.

**Strategically motivated simulation in discourse.** The fourth element of the technologisation of discourse was simulation in the discourse. By this, Fairclough (2010) explained, the discourse techniques, which originated from outside of the organization, were valued based on a “strategic calculation of their effectivity” (p. 139). One of the ways in which the Danielson Group demonstrated the “effectivity” of the FFT was through repeated references to the research that supported the framework. The website’s

“Research” page included various links to studies on the FFT and its use. In terms of genre, a page entitled “Research” carried academic clout and rigor within an educational context. A product that was backed with research suggested its superiority to others, and the Danielson Group further noted, “We maintain a strong interest in encouraging independent research in support of quality professional development, process improvements, and significant teaching outcomes.” The type of research included on the page was defined as “independent,” which both amplified the statement and positively appraised the research through appreciation because independent research provided evidence of the FFT’s value by engaging the voices of additional outsiders.<sup>4</sup> However, the syntactical development of the sentence suggested that the research that they had an interest in supporting was that which found their product as having “quality” and “significance,” both of which amplified the positive appraisal of the research outcomes listed on the page. The page was heteroglossic in nature through projection, which meant that by including the outside voices of researchers, who supported the value of the FFT, the instrument was provided with a degree of credibility, which it would not have if it were monoglossic. In line with the broader process of technologisation, the outsider’s

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<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note that the first study highlighted on the Danielson Group’s “Research” page entitled “Teaching to the Core” was actually commissioned by the Danielson Group as outlined in the introduction of the “key findings” document, which is linked to the page. The study was funded by the Helmsley Charitable Trust, a group that has awarded two grants to the Danielson Group totaling over 3.4 million dollars (Helmsley Charitable Trust, 2014). While the researchers were perhaps independent and the Danielson Group did not directly fund the study, they were listed as “commission[ing]” it (Martin & Mertl, 2014). Because of this, it would be unlikely that the researchers, albeit independent, would find the FFT to be unusable or inherently flawed in some way so as to negate its use entirely. At worst, the study would perhaps find ways to improve the FFT to make it more marketable in an era where 45 states have adopted the Common Core State Standards.

perspective offered value to the discourse technique's "effectivity" that an insider could not provide.

**Pressure toward standardization.** The last element of the technologisation of discourse was a pressure toward standardization, which represented a culmination of and reaction to the process in its entirety. Technologists and their seemingly context-free techniques changed the discourse within an organization, and this dialectically changed those participating in the newly designed discursive practices (Fairclough, 2010). While an analysis of the influence of those pressures on practitioners was beyond the scope of this paper, the Danielson Group's FAQs page exemplified each of the previously described elements of technologisation through its heteroglossic invocation of other voices. That is, the questions that were "frequently asked" were those that allude to this standardizing pressure. The FAQs page of the website was broken down into three basic sections, including questions on the FFT, training, and resources, each of which was accessible through a navigation bar on the left side of the page. Generically, FAQs represented a way for the Danielson Group to both clarify potential misunderstandings in addition to addressing the counterarguments of potential naysayers. The questions were structured with acknowledgement of the opposition (a concession) and a response (a refutation) of the validity of any opposing position.

The section entitled "General Questions about the Framework" encompassed each of the elements of technologisation, and taken as a whole, exemplified the fifth element of the process, pressure toward standardization. In response to the first question regarding the "original purpose" of the FFT, Charlotte Danielson answered from a first-person perspective, claiming, "I intended it to be a definition of good teaching." To suggest that

she provided the “definition” gave her collective work a sense of authority as the expert discourse technologist, despite the fact that her role as a “former economist” was positively appraised and emphasized on her biographical page. She further explained that she “hoped (and wrote) that it might be useful for any number of purposes,” including for “teachers’ own self assessment and reflection,” a way which the teachers would judge themselves. This use for the FFT was appraised as the “most important,” but she also listed others, including “teacher evaluation” the last potential use for the framework, which served as a transition for the next paragraph, where she further explained that there has been “tension” that has arisen in recent years due to the “new emphasis on teaching evaluation,” an assessment that alluded to the crisis climate that provoked the development of a variety of strategies across the country to rectify seemingly lacking teacher evaluation systems. She noted that “people have had to base their evaluations on **something**,” emphasizing the word in bold. The original intent of the FFT, as she noted, used words that focused on the person (“the teacher’s own self assessment”), but the basis of evaluations on “something” suggested evidence as a separate entity. Ironically, the phrasing even changed from the first to second paragraph from “teacher evaluation” into “teaching evaluation” (emphasis added). The person and practice were seemingly divided and moved away from the first-person reflection tool to a second-person appraisal tool.

The second question addressed in the “General Questions about the Framework” spoke to the shift in policing of discourse practices: “Why should a state or district adopt the *Framework for Teaching*?” Unlike the first question, which took a more personalized tone through the use of first- and second-person pronouns, there was a prosodic shift for

the second question's answer, which was objective and scientific. The answer was divided into three paragraphs, logically organized and structured in an ordinal sequence. The first reason provided for why states and districts should have adopted the FFT was appraised positively through post-positivist terminology; it was described as a "valid instrument for defining effective teaching," backed by research that demonstrated its "predictive validity." The heteroglossic engagement of outside research provided a rationale for a district or state to shift policing practices away from the local level and adopt the FFT. While the FFT's value was explained objectively as "defining effective teaching," there was a blurred line between judgment and appreciation because the "predictive validity" of the instrument was based on how "teachers *demonstrate* high levels of proficiency" as compared to "teachers *who perform* less well" (emphasis added). That is, the person and practice were subtly recontextualized through two different syntactical constructions, where one's success was positively appraised and objectively constructed ("teachers demonstrate") while one's failure was negatively judged ("teachers who perform"). The question's answer further explained that the FFT's evaluative criteria "represent a natural progression for teachers as they acquire greater experience and expertise" and that it was "supported by a large ecosystem of training and online materials." The phrasing alluded to the sciences, and the use of the metaphor here served as a positive appreciation of the company, services, and products ("training and online materials"), which were necessary components for survival and sustainability of the system if adopted by a particular organization.

The third question addressed in this section of the FAQs asked, "What do you think of states or districts modifying the *Framework for Teaching*?" The response again

shifted back to a more personalized tone, where Danielson spoke from the first-person perspective: “I discourage educators from making revisions to the Framework, since that can jeopardize its validity. The language in the levels of performance for the FFT has evolved since 1996; it has become more precise and tighter, with clearer distinctions.” Again, the phrasing suggested the value of the FFT through objectivity and allusions to scientific precision, amplified through the attitudinal lexis describing the “distinctions.” The answer, which was directly from Danielson as the expert discourse technologist, reflected the “strategically motivated simulation” in the technologisation process (Fairclough, 2010, p. 138). If districts wanted to “customize it for use in their own setting,” she went on to explain, “my advice is to add possible examples to illustrate practice in that setting” rather than changing the framework. In other words, Danielson suggested that districts should set up examples or simulations to fit into the already prescribed elements of the FFT.

Finally, an additional question in this section of the FAQs exemplified the FFT as context-free, the final element of the technologisation of discourse. The question asked, “Does the *Framework for Teaching* apply to all situations?” The response again prosodically shifted in tone back to a more objective one, noting that “The FFT is intended to apply to all disciplines, K12. That is grounded in the simple fact that teaching, in whatever context, requires the same basic tasks[.]” Writing that the FFT applied to “all” disciplines suggested its transferability. However, this statement was then hedged and qualified with the next, where she addressed a potential counterargument to the wide-ranging applicability of the FFT. She first conceded, explaining that the “details of how each of those things is done, naturally, is highly level and discipline specific.”



Syntactically, the inclusion of the word “naturally” in the middle of the sentence suggested that it was unarguable, an obvious statement and that there was an individual, natural element to teaching. The next sentence, however, provided the refutation of the previous: “But in general, the FFT is intended to apply equally to primary mathematics and high school studio art.” Again, the phrasing was objective, including words that suggested a scientific basis to support the claims. The FFT could “apply equally” to K-12 teaching, a claim that supported and positively appraised it as context-free.

The Danielson Group’s website also seemed to address any potential concerns regarding the blurred lines between teachers and their practice in evaluations. The FAQs section entitled “Questions about making evaluative data and examination of artifacts,” began with a question, asking how assessments from multiple observations may be “combined in a single rating.” The response was presented with an objective tone from a third-person perspective, noting that “the observer must consider the ‘preponderance of evidence’ to determine the level of performance for each component.” The quotation marks suggested that the phrasing was heteroglossic, borrowed from an outside authoritative source, which validated and thereby positively appraised the statement, but ironically, it was also not accompanied by any citation. The response further noted that “following an examination of the artifacts for each component, a judgment is made linking the evidence to the statements in the levels of performance.” The passive voice construction (“a judgment is made”) eliminated the evaluator and his or her stance, suggesting an objectivity in the process when evaluating a teacher’s “level of performance.” The person and practice were divided; “evidence” of the teaching practice was in some way removed from the person doing the teaching, a division which spoke to

the final element in technologisation process where “people are unsure about what is genuine and what is synthetic” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 140).

The Danielson Group addressed this potential counterargument to the use of the FFT in the next paragraph, first conceding and then refuting: “It should be remembered, however, that the score resulting from an average of scores on individual components of the FFT is just that, an average of performance. It, in itself, does not constitute an evaluative judgment about that teacher.” The way to ameliorate this potential problem, they further explained, was that the “evaluator might want to consider that improvement [over the course of the school year] when making the final, evaluative, judgment.” While the word “might” hedged and softened the appraisal of what evaluators should have done, the words “final” and “evaluative” amplified the force of the word “judgment” through redundancy.

The reader was then directed to the next question, which asked, “How can the assessments of the teacher’s practice be converted to an evaluation of the teacher?” Because this question and response addressed directly a blurring of the lines between person and practice, the answer is included and then analyzed in its entirety below:

The headings in the levels of performance in the *Framework for Teaching* (unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, and distinguished) are descriptive words – that is, they don’t on their own, make a judgment; they merely describe the practice. On the other hand, words used to evaluate teachers (words like ineffective, needs improvement, effective, and highly effective) are judgmental words; they are used to evaluate. Many educators are inclined to simply equate the descriptive words with the evaluative words... Some systems even replace the FFT descriptive

words (basic, etc.) with the judgment words (effective, etc.). I recommend that school districts (or states, if the decisions are made at that level) use different words for the evaluative judgments made regarding teachers from the words used for the levels of performance of practice (such as unsatisfactory, etc. in the Danielson Framework). In that case, evaluators must be able to translate from one to the other.

From a first-person perspective again, Danielson as the authoritative expert, explained that the FFT included “descriptive” words to appraise the practice of teaching, but “judgmental” words were often used to describe the teacher him or herself in teacher evaluations. Danielson pointed to the flaw of “simply equat[ing]” the two. Yet, the distinction was unclear as both are evaluative in nature. Generically, the fact that there was an entire question dedicated to addressing potential concerns on how to “convert” practice into judgment of a person suggested how the two could become conflated. The solution, Danielson explained, was to simply use different words: one for the FFT domains and one set for the evaluation of the teacher him or herself. Those people conducting the evaluations then “must be able to translate” the former into the latter; this implied and assumed the user’s ability to do so. While the response in its entirety suggested that a distinction was possible and necessary, the use of the word “translate” suggested that they were merely labeled differently but had the same meaning. Judgment and appreciation resources were recontextualized and seemingly artificially divided, reflecting the pressure of standardization, the final element of the technologisation of discourse.

## **Discussion and Implications**

In September 2015, The Danielson Group website featured a press release that began with an introduction to Charlotte Danielson's new book, in which she wrote, "Between the call for more rigorous teacher-evaluation procedures and the higher standards set for student learning, a perfect storm has emerged, demanding that we all take a more critical look at the ways we're supporting accomplished teaching." The "perfect storm" to which Danielson referred was the context of crisis surrounding teacher evaluation reform, and as Fairclough (2010) noted, crisis could spark discursive changes through various strategies for change. The Danielson Group presented their FFT, resources, and other materials as parts of a collective strategy for change that could contribute to teacher evaluation reform movements across the country. The origins of these changes stemmed from Danielson herself, who was aligned on the company's webpage as an expert able to provide both a definition of "good teaching" and a way by which school districts could measure this teaching and evaluate their teachers. The FFT represented a change strategy that was part of greater neoliberal reform initiatives targeting teacher evaluation policies and procedures.

This study analyzed the genre, discourse, and style of the discursive changes realized in the Danielson FFT and represented on the Danielson Group's website. This study explored questions of how the website appraised strategies for change to ameliorate a perceived crisis in education relating to teacher evaluation reform. It also examined how the Danielson Group, as a leading voice in this movement, publically presented the origins of such changes on their website. Discursively, this study demonstrated that the Danielson Group's website represented a technologisation of discourse for teacher

evaluations, the elements of which could culminate in a “powerful impetus towards standardization and normalization of discourse practices” leading to other potential crises where “people come to be unsure of what is genuine and what is synthetic” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 140). Stylistically, while the Danielson Group seemed to address this directly on their FAQs page, the appraisal analysis exemplified how the lines between judgment and appreciation were blurred. Prosaically, the tonal shifts between more objective and subjective stances were also reflective of this tension and the greater technologisation process.

This study was both self-conscious and self-reflective of the teacher evaluation process. It was self-conscious in that it evaluated the language of evaluation (appraisal) about teacher evaluations on the Danielson Group website. It was also self-reflective in the sense that I was conscious of my position as both a researcher and teacher, subject to evaluations employing the FFT. All qualitative research employs an emergent and iterative process that is continually shaped by the researcher’s “construction of knowledge” (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 5). Therefore, it must be noted that my evaluation of the FFT was necessarily filtered through my understanding of it. In addition, there is a certainly a need for more research to further explore implications for policy and practice regarding the Danielson Group’s role in teacher evaluation reform. Future research may critically examine other aspects of the Danielson Group’s strategies for change, including their on-site training sessions for evaluators, their partnerships with other organizations such as Teachscape and the Educational Testing Service (ETS), and the conversations between evaluators and teachers, using the Danielson FFT.

## Conclusion

In the current context of education reform as in other neoliberal reform movements of the past, the individual, in theory, has had the potential to become highly successful amid such reforms, but only under privileged conditions. The increased responsibility on the part of the individual suggests that any “personal failure is generally attributed to personal failings” (Harvey, 2005, p. 76). This study’s appraisal analysis demonstrated that the Danielson Group’s website stressed the need to separate the teacher him or herself from the observable evidence that accounted for his or her practice in order to objectively define teacher quality. Yet, Fairclough (2010) warned that the collective technologisation process could take an emotional toll on those subjected to such discursive changes. The conflated presentation of person and practice realized in the discourse of the Danielson Group’s website could arguably contribute to these anxieties, where teachers could internalize the “gaze” from the outside (Larsen, 2005, p. 301), feel as though they are “under attack” (Giroux, 2010, p. 347) or “not worthy of professional survival” (Tienken, 2013, p. 305). More than ever, educational professionals must acknowledge the connection between the teacher, a person, with his or her practice. Without it, “the widespread simulation of conversation and its cultural values may lead to a crisis of sincerity and a crisis of credibility and a general cynicism, where people come to be unsure of what is genuine and what is synthetic” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 140). While the Danielson Group’s website represented a technologisation of the discourse as a way to ameliorate the perceived crisis in teacher evaluation policies of the past, a denial of the link between person and practice may very well perpetuate a crisis of its own.

## Chapter 6

### **Metaphorically Constructing the Critical Conversation: Analyzing a Principal's Agency and Enactment of Discourse in a Time of Change**

Recent changes to teacher evaluation systems across the country have been representative of a greater movement toward neoliberal education reforms in this area, which have valued the influence of the private sector in public education contexts. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how principals made meaning of the Danielson FFT as a strategy for change in light of New Jersey's recently adopted TeachNJ Act. The Danielson Group, a private company, and their FFT have become a leading influence in teacher evaluations in both New Jersey and across the country. Using a dialectical-relational approach to CDA, this research explored the principal's role in the greater discourse of teacher evaluation reform, which was theoretically situated as a response to perceived crisis and was guided by Fairclough's (2010) conception of the technologisation of discourse. Through an exploration of elements of genre, style, and discourse through appraisal analysis, this study demonstrated that a principal's enactment of the discourse was dialectically related to both his role as a social agent in the change and his appraisals of the process as a whole.

In recent years, the globalization of economic markets and the influence of an ever-increasingly connected global infrastructure have greatly impacted many education reforms, including systems by which teachers are evaluated. Although there are varying systems of teacher evaluation across the globe (Gilbert, 2011; Lathan, 2011; Pini & Gorostiaga, 2008), neoliberalism and economic globalization have created an environment where teacher evaluation, assessment, and quality control have become more standardized and systematic (Larsen, 2005; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). This, in

turn, has impacted the ways in which many Western countries have emphasized particular values (accountability, quality control, standards, competition, and performance) in teacher evaluation policies. Neoliberalism is the belief that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). It represents the belief that schools would benefit from policy reforms, which include less government spending and more influence from the free market and private sector (Gabbard & Atkinson, 2007; Giroux, 2010; Larsen, 2005; Lonsbury & Apple, 2012; Tienken, 2013).

While these changes that have occurred on a global scale, education reform movements in the United States have also followed suit in recent years. Private companies, entrepreneurs, and philanthropic organizations have gained an increasingly influential role in education’s public sector (Koppich & Esch, 2012). In addition, the Obama Administration’s RTTT initiative has spurred a variety of reform movements at the state-level, which have prompted schools to respond to more external pressures to meet the new demands (Koppich & Esch, 2012; Lonsbury & Apple, 2012; McGuinn, 2012). State agencies across the United States have also gained more power in influencing district-level initiatives (Henig, 2009; McGuinn, 2011; McGuinn, 2012; Mokher, 2010; Shober, 2012). Governor Chris Christie of New Jersey, a staunch advocate for a free-market system approach to education reform, has led the way toward sweeping changes to many education policies (Tienken, 2013). One of the most radical policy changes came from the inception of the TeachNJ Act, which fundamentally changed teacher evaluations and teacher tenure by requiring districts to use one of the



state-approved evaluation models, each of which purported to use objective, data-driven measures. Changes to the law were accompanied by the rise in popularity of private companies such as the Danielson Group, which took a leading role in providing the most widely used, state-approved teacher evaluation framework to districts across the state. In August 2012, the TeachNJ Act was passed, and by September 2013, the State Board of Education approved AchieveNJ, guidelines for effectively implementing the requirements set out by the TeachNJ Act (NJDOE, 2012, 2014a). The law sought to provide individualized feedback to teachers and other educators so that they could develop their skills while remaining focused on student achievement, rewarding those teachers who were deemed effective, and providing support or eliminating teachers who were identified as ineffective (NJDOE, 2012).

The highly dynamic nature of education reform movements created a work environment “where means and ends [we]re not always clear” (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 733). Principals have played a key role in school governance with regard to policy implementation because they have served as mediators between school staff and central office, who often handed down ambiguous or abstract policy directives, forcing principals to make meaning of them before putting them into practice (Ingle et al., 2011). As a discursive act, reform movements have offered a powerful impetus toward change. These changes produced and perpetuated “truths” through the discourse emerging from various school reform initiatives, many of which have focused on accountability (Larsen, 2005, p. 297). Educational professionals’ communication with one another and use of texts (both written and orally conveyed) became both representations of the required changes in addition to reciprocally contributing to the discourse of reform.

In an era of accountability, texts produced for and used by school districts in response to the TeachNJ Act represented signifiers of compliance that have been informed by the changing policy environment, and principals have played a pivotal role in this process. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how principals made meaning of the Danielson FFT, the most widely used and approved teacher evaluation model under the TeachNJ Act guidelines (McGuinn, 2012), and a popular choice among school districts nationwide. This research sought to analyze the principal's role in the greater discourse surrounding teacher evaluation reform, and specifically sought to explore how principals understood, used, and valued the Danielson FFT through their enactment of the discourse of reform.

## **Literature Review**

**The principal's integral role.** Quantification methods, seemingly objective measures for evaluating teacher effectiveness, and other accountability policies have increased in popularity in recent years, both in the United States and globally (Gabbard & Atkinson, 2007; Gilbert, 2011; Giroux, 2010; Goldhaber et al., 2013; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010; Hill et al., 2011; Koppich & Esch, 2012; Larsen, 2005; Lonsbury & Apple, 2012; Tienken, 2013; Yeh, 2012). Yet, the subjective role of the school leader has been undeniably pivotal to the implementation process of any such change initiative. Principals and other building-level leaders at the forefront of implementation efforts have been essential to how policy develops, and as instructional leaders of their buildings, they have played a crucial role in shaping policy (Koyama & Varenne, 2012; Spillane & Kenney, 2012; Spillane et al., 2011). Researchers have found that principals were influential and functioned in an intermediary position between the outside environment

and internal school community as they made sense of policies, communicated the mandates to their stakeholders, and even created new routines or procedures to comply with external requirements while maintaining internal consistency (Ingle et al., 2011; Koyama, 2014; Louis & Robinson, 2012; Spillane et al., 2002; Spillane et al., 2011; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). Therefore, principals' perspectives on teacher quality have been of vital importance when determining and making meaning of the oft ambiguous notion of "teacher quality."

The ways in which principals understood policies have also been shown to have a profound impact on their implementation (Ingle et al., 2011; Jacob, 2011; Koyama, 2014; Koyama & Varenne, 2012; Louis & Robinson, 2012; Spillane et al., 2002; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). The principal's role and teacher evaluation policy formation were dialectically related. Principals essentially functioned as "local policy makers" and they "play[ed] active policy roles in negotiating federal regulations and local initiatives, as well as selectively performing assessment and accountability mandates" (Koyama, 2014, pp. 279, 282). Principals have been both impacted by and impact new policies as they implement changes in their schools (Ingle et al., 2011; Jacob, 2011; Larsen, 2005). How principals enacted such accountability policies has been determined to be a highly individualized and complex process (Koyama, 2014; Rutledge et al., 2010; Spillane et al., 2002). A principal's identity, prior experiences, and the stage at which his or her school was in the change process all influenced the principal's understanding of accountability and implementation of new policies (Spillane et al., 2002). Accountability mandates and initiatives coming from state and federal government may have also impacted principals' hiring decisions, compliance to directives, how they served as instructional leaders in

their buildings, and the ways in which the school complied with mandates (Louis & Robinson, 2012; Rutledge et al., 2010).

**The enactment of policy changes.** The ways in which principals enacted policies also varied. Some argue that principals may have enacted policy within their buildings through surface-level or symbolic compliance by, for example, rewriting the school's mission statement or using the rhetoric of reform without following through with action, consciously keeping operations at a discursive level (Rutledge et al., 2010). Principals have also acted as a mediating force within a policy environment, which was driven by increased pressures from accountability mandates (Ingle et al., 2011; Koyama, 2014; Rutledge et al., 2010; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). The process by which principals navigated, enacted, and implemented policies may have simply represented an “ephemeral and loosely coupled assemblage” of compliance or principals may have been involved in “gaming the system” when presented with new accountability mandates (Koyama, 2014, p. 281; Spillane & Kenney, 2012).

Yet, others, such as Ingle et al. (2011) and Rutledge et al. (2010), have noted that what appeared to be simple, superficial compliance may not have been passive resistance or manipulation on the part of principals, but rather, could have been a way that principals were attempting to modify practice in good faith, dealing with and ultimately interpreting what were often ambiguous or unclearly defined directives. Louis and Robinson (2012) also found that the degree of implementation was more conditional. If principals saw accountability mandates as a hindrance, it was likely that they led a surface-level implementation. They noted, “Oppositional thinking, that sees the conflict rather than the common ground between school-based improvement strategies and those

of the state and district, will inhibit formulating a goal that is inclusive of both” (p. 659). On the other hand, if the principals thought that the policies were aligned with their own visions, they were more likely to internalize the mandates, which the authors found had a positive impact on their behaviors in tailoring the mandates to their students’ and staffs’ needs (Louis & Robinson, 2012). District and school-level personnel may have been far removed from those who were responsible for initiating reforms, but principals played an undeniably pivotal role in the implementation process when faced with external demands (Epstein, 2004; Ingle et al., 2011; Kirst, 2004; Koyama, 2014; Koyama & Varenne, 2012; Louis & Robinson, 2012; Spillane et al., 2002; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). Principals have been and will remain “primary and important agents” in teacher evaluation (Ingle et al., 2011, p. 603).

Even though the research showed the vital role that principals have played in shaping policy through the implementation process, district and school-level administrators seemed to have had less authority or control when it came to policy. These included those that impacted teacher evaluations, and these changes were enacted in the discourse. Research has pointed to the increasingly influential role of external agencies and resources, primarily from the private sector, whose function it was to support schools in implementation of various reforms due to an overwhelming lack of infrastructure and capacity (Honig, 2004; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). The increased demands placed on principals and other educational professionals from the outside may be explained through what Fairclough (2010) refers to as the technologisation of discourse.

## **Theoretical Framework**

**The technologisation of discourse.** Fairclough's (2010) conception of the technologisation of discourse includes five characteristics and is defined as "a process of intervention in the sphere of discourse practices with the objective of constructing a new hegemony in the order of discourse of the institution or organization concerned..." (p. 137). The technologisation of discourse represents how power structures may be reworked within a discourse community or field of study. These discursive changes represent strategies for change, where new structures or technologies are thereby realized in the discourse through an introduction of voices promoting new practices, new ways of controlling or monitoring these practices within the discourse, and ultimately controlling their perpetuation and future use.

The fifth and most integral characteristic of the technologisation of discourse is what Fairclough (2010) describes as the "pressure toward standardization" (p. 138), and it represents how modifications in the discourse impact people in the process. In the wake of technologizing changes, people may respond to the pressures of adopting new discursive practices in a variety of ways: "they may comply, they may tactically appear to comply, they may refuse to be budged, or they may arrive at all sorts of accommodations and compromises between existing practices and new techniques" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 141). The pressures create an environment where people must respond. The technologisation of discourse is a reciprocal change process; the more the discourse changes so too do the people enacting that discourse.

**The principal's social agency in response to "pressures to standardize."** As instructional leaders of their buildings, principals function as social agents. The term "social agent" suggests that an individual both impacts and is impacted by the discourse in which he or she participates because "social practices 'mediate' the relationship between social structures at the most general and abstract level and particular, concrete social events" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 232). The word "agent" further suggests a duality. First, an agent may be defined as one, who is subject to these social forces, or one, who acts in accordance with or on behalf of another person, or in this case, discourse. In addition, the term "agent" also suggests that the person has a degree of "agency" or willful ability to influence or impact the discourse at hand.

The interaction between discourse technologies, which resulted from reform movements, and principals, who functioned as social agents in enacting them, represents a dialectical discursive change. It is the last element of the technologisation process described by Fairclough (2010) as the "pressure toward standardization" (p. 138). This influence, which emanates from outside the immediate context, is one to which principals need to respond and one that dialectically influences how they enact the discourse in their school settings. That is, through their meaning-making process, they must appraise or assign value to both the discursive changes and their larger roles as social agents as they navigate the pressures to standardize.

**The present study.** Using the technologisation of discourse as a framework for understanding the change process, this study focused on the discourse surrounding New Jersey's new teacher evaluation models, which emerged as a result of the TeachNJ Act. Cochran-Smith (2005) argued that "understanding the rhetoric of reform is central to

deconstructing the politics of teacher education” (p. 183). This same concept provided a rationale for further exploring the new teacher evaluation policies in New Jersey. The recent adoption of the TeachNJ Act and its implementation through AchieveNJ represented yet another facet of the much broader push toward greater accountability in schools. Changes to teacher evaluations were in their first years of implementation across the state, and it will likely remain unclear for some time just how these new policies will impact teachers and the collective profession in the future. Spillane et al. (2002) noted, “Most research on accountability has focused on the effects of these initiatives on student achievement and, to a lesser extent, their influence on classroom instruction. Ironically, the role of school principals in implementing accountability-based policies has gone largely ignored” (p. 732). As leaders in their buildings, principals were not only subject to the influences of the greater context of changes to teacher quality and evaluation methods, but were also key contributors to the rhetoric within their school communities.

There have been numerous studies that have explored how principals made meaning of and implemented accountability policies in their schools, but there have been far fewer examples that explore how principals implement teacher evaluation policies. Due to this dearth in the research and because implementation of New Jersey’s TeachNJ initiative was still in its formative years, this research examined how one principal made meaning of policies that stressed accountability, standards, quality control, and competition. Specifically, it explored how one mid-sized New Jersey school district’s principal enacted the discourse and how his prior experiences informed his current understanding and uses of the FFT. It further demonstrated how he appraised or assigned



value the FFT, and how he explained his sense of agency as an educational leader in the teacher evaluation change process.

## **Methods**

This study employed CDA as a strategy of inquiry, and specifically used Fairclough's (2010) dialectical-relational approach. CDA is a "heterogeneous school," which "allows for continuous debates, for changes in the aims and goals, and for innovation" (Wodak & Meyer, 2013, p. 5). CDA has been used as a strategy of inquiry in educational research for some time, and it has been used to explore a wide range of topics, including those associated with policy, practice, and theory (Rogers, 2011; Rogers et al., 2005). CDA has also been used as a strategy of inquiry to specifically explore topics associated with teacher evaluation policies around the world, the instruments associated with teacher evaluation, definitions of teacher quality in both k-12 and higher education contexts, and both media and policy documents' representations of teachers in both the United States and abroad (Caughlan & Jiang, 2014; Cohen, 2010; Crebbin, 1997; Pini & Gorostiaga, 2008; Sternod, 2011; Taylor, 2004; Thomas, 2003, 2005, 2011). While CDA has been used in educational research for some time, it has not, to date, been used to specifically explore the principal's role in enacting teacher evaluation reforms.

While the methodologies associated with CDA are wide-ranging, Fairclough's (2010) dialectical-relational approach "is focused on two dialectical relations: between structure (especially social practices as an intermediate level of structuring) and events (or between structure and action, structure and strategy) and, within each, between semiotic and other elements" (p. 232). It is not a simple application of methods, but rather a way of theoretically framing and constructing the researchable object (Fairclough,

2010). The ways in which social practices are realized are through genres or “ways of acting,” discourses or “ways of representing,” and styles or “ways of being” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 26). That is, the social contexts in which we live are realized through various texts in the discourse through the use of different discursive, stylistic, and generic choices and conventions (Eggins, 2004; Martin & Rose, 2007). As such, this study’s theoretical framework and methodological design focused on dialectical relations and the changing roles of principals as social agents in light of the greater technologisation of discourse. The research was guided by the following two research questions, which were adapted from Fairclough’s (2010) recommendations for CDA of strategies in response to crisis: (a) how do principals function as “social agents” in promoting the discourse emergent from changes to New Jersey’s teacher evaluations? and (b) what are the origins of these strategies for change using the Danielson FFT?

**Context.** The “semiotic point of entry” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 237) for the project was to explore how principals functioned as social agents through their appraisal of the Danielson FFT and changing teacher evaluations in New Jersey. The study sought to focus on the lived experiences principals, who were working in a mid-sized, middle class New Jersey school district. The district, which served close to 3,500 students in grades kindergarten through 12, first adopted the Danielson FFT for teacher evaluations during the 2012-2013 school year in order to comply with the TeachNJ Act’s new requirements. This study analyzed how principals understood the adoption of the Danielson FFT in their district and how they enacted and appraised their changing roles as social agents. Data were collected from three principals working in the district, each of whom worked in buildings serving different grade levels (early childhood, middle, and high school) and

had varying background experiences prior to assuming their current positions. The intent of the project was not to randomly sample participants for generalizability, but rather, to achieve a degree of transferability, which aimed to relay confirmable, dependable information that may contribute to other research, while maintaining specificity or uniqueness of this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Toma, 2006).

**Data collection.** I used three participants to collect data throughout this project, with whom I conducted semi-structured interviews and from whom I collected documents and materials that they felt most reflected their understanding of the Danielson FFT. I also maintained a researcher journal throughout the research process. Interviews helped “portray ongoing social processes” such as the participants’ appraisal of the changes to teacher evaluations and their roles as social agents (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 4). I took a responsive interviewing approach, allowing the conversation to stray from the protocol questions when appropriate based on the answers that the participants provided (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). All interviews were recorded on two audio-recording devices and subsequently transcribed verbatim. At the conclusion of each interview, I asked participants if they would share any documents or presentation materials that they felt were most valuable to their use and understanding of the Danielson FFT in their setting. These were collected and organized in an archive, “a diverse collection of materials that enable you to engage with and think about the specific research problem or questions” (Rapley, 2007, p. 10). Although data were collected from three participants, the findings reported below focused on one participant’s enactment of the discourse in

order to provide sufficient depth in analyzing how one principal appraised his social agency within a changing policy environment.

**Data analysis.** Data analysis ran concurrently throughout this project as I collected data. Because this project used CDA as strategy of inquiry, it sought explore both the overt and subtle nuances inherent in the language used by principals as they described their experiences with the Danielson FFT. Interview transcripts, documents, and materials were input into Dedoose and analyzed to explore the ways in which appraisal resources expressed the principals' attitudes. The appraisal process is "concerned with evaluation – the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced and readers aligned" (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 25). The key resources of appraisal include affect, judgment, and appreciation. Affect is an expression of feelings, which can be both concrete or abstract and positive or negative (Martin & Rose, 2007). Judgment resources are those that are used in order to describe the value of an individual and may be personal (i.e., positive and admiring or negative and criticizing) or moral (i.e., positive and praising or negative and condemning) in nature (Martin & Rose, 2007). Finally, appreciation resources are those that express the value of things, both concrete and abstract (Martin & Rose, 2007). Attitudes expressed in an appraisal may be "amplified" or "hedged" through graduation by increasing or decreasing the force and focus of the appraisal (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 25). Additionally, an appraisal may be represented as coming exclusively from the speaker (monoglossic), or through the invocation of others' voices (heteroglossia) through the process of engagement (Martin & Rose, 2007).

I also used analytical memo writing to critically review the interview transcripts, documents, and other materials collected from the principals (Saldaña, 2013). Memo writing helped to “not only capture [my] analytic thinking about [my] data, but also *facilitate* such thinking, stimulating analytic insights” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 105). I used analytical memo writing to accompany this process to interpret the data through genre, discourse, and style by exploring the data, in terms of generic conventions for the documents or materials (genre), through the study’s theoretical framework of the technologisation process (discourse), and through the prosodic patterns in the use of appraisal resources during interviews (style). Analyzing both what the principals shared in addition to identifying any “silences” both within the documents and among the collective archive gave me a greater sense of the participants’ perspectives because “exploring a text often depends as much on *focusing on what is said* – and how a specific argument, idea or concept is developed – as well as *focusing on what is not said* – the silences, gaps or omissions” (Rapley, 2007, p. 111). The outcomes that emerged from this analytical process were ultimately interpreted and contextualized in light of current practice, in context with information gathered through a comprehensive literature review, and through theory.

## **Findings**

The principals, whom I interviewed and from whom I collected materials, described the origins of the change process in their district, both locally and globally, as emanating from outside of their buildings. They expressed that central office handed down the initiatives to them. They had little or no say in selecting the FFT as their new teacher evaluation model, but they were not necessarily disheartened by the decision

which was, according to one participant, made “behind closed doors.” All of the principals also agreed that the FFT attempted to standardize the discourse, eliminate biases, and create more objectivity in the teacher evaluation process. However, the ways in which they positively or negatively appraised the value of the FFT and general changes to teacher evaluation reforms, represented their staffs, and characterized their social agency represented their unique experiences.

In the pages that follow, I present one principal’s enactment of the discourse at length in order to show how he made meaning of the origins of changes to teacher evaluations in addition to exploring how he generically, stylistically, and discursively presented his social agency through the change process. The rationale for focusing on a single principal here was to provide sufficient depth to the analysis within given length limitations for this article. In addition, this principal’s realization of the discourse was particularly interesting on a discursive level because of his intense interest in the language of the Danielson FFT and with the greater discourse surrounding teacher evaluation reforms. Therefore, this article explores the linguistic aspects of change on both textual and metatextual level. That is, not only was the power of language a topic in which this principal was deeply interested, but it was also reflected through the ways in which this principal enacted the greater discourse of change.

**“Pushing the boundaries”: Identity as principal, teacher, and student.**

Joseph<sup>5</sup> had worked in education for more than 20 years. At the time of this research project, he was working as the high school principal and was beginning his 4<sup>th</sup> year in the

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<sup>5</sup> Here and throughout, I have removed identifiable information pertaining to participants’ identities and to the district. Pseudonyms have been used in order to protect confidentiality.

district. This was his first position as a principal, which he began in September 2012.

Prior to working in the district, he previously worked as a middle and high school English teacher for over 10 years in two different districts and also served as an assistant principal and supervisor of English and history. He characterized himself as a “push-the-boundaries kind of person” with an intense interest in language, literature, and the arts.

Throughout my interviews with him, he often positioned himself as a teacher and student, who valued relationships and risk-taking. Some statements were prefaced with “as a teacher...” or “we’re notorious as teachers for...” constructing himself stylistically as a teacher in addition to high school principal through his use of the plural first-person “we.” He also explained, “My best experience as a student came from a kind of one-to-one [relationship] ... And I think the closer we can get to that in a school model, the better.” He positively appraised the value of relationships, taking on the perspective of student, which suggested both his connection to the students and staff in his building, but also his position as a continuing learner. However, he then followed this appraisal with a qualification, expressing his concerns for how these values were challenged by current schooling systems:

Our administrative structures don’t always lend themselves to it. You know, my personal bias is towards a very tight supervisor-teacher relationship, where that constant dialogue about curriculum, about practices, about taking chances instructionally is ongoing and rewarded and encouraged. To fail or succeed or to take a shot at it, but I don’t think most of our schools are built that way.

He valued and positively appraised “taking chances instructionally,” using words such as “very tight” and “constant” to amplify the force of his statements. He also emphasized

and positively appraised the ability “to fail,” which was prioritized syntactically over the value of “succeed[ing].” However, he ended with a qualification, explaining that the “structures” and the ways in which “schools [were] built” were a hindrance to achieving this.

Joseph also positively appraised risk-taking and creativity through allusions to Silicon Valley companies like Google, which he explained, had “an innovation room and they ha[d] creative time and they *pay[ed]* for it,” noting that they highly valued innovation and creativity through its association with monetary compensation. He also alluded to Sir Ken Robinson’s (2006) TEDTalk entitled “Do Schools Kill Creativity?” He similarly offered a positive appraisal Robinson’s criticism of how creativity and the arts have been undervalued in traditional schooling models. This resonated with Joseph’s overall discomfort with the standardization process.

**The FFT as tool: Concerns over killing the “metaphor.”** Stylistically, his characterization of himself throughout the interview as teacher, student, and building principal in addition to his references to proponents of creative thinking embodied his characterization of himself as “pushing-the-boundaries” through the ways in which he enacted the greater discourse on regimented standardization. Although Joseph explained that the intentions and origins of changes to teacher evaluation procedures were likely not “ill-intentioned” and his appraisal was generally positive when compared to his district’s previous “binary system,”<sup>6</sup> he expressed concerns about the “quantification” of the discourse through the Danielson FFT tool, which eliminated “the metaphors” and

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<sup>6</sup> The binary system, he explained, consisted of a list of characteristics on which teachers were rated as “proficient or not,” but “gave no quality information for anyone to grow,” a sentiment that was “universally acknowledged in this district.”



discounted the “human element” of teaching. In referencing his previous training with the Danielson Group, he noted the guidelines on the language that they were instructed to use in conducting teacher evaluations using the FFT:

You can’t write anything about ... ‘it *seemed*, it *appeared*.’ This happened. This matches this box. That happened or it didn’t. You can’t say, ‘The students *appeared* to be enjoying class ... There was *excitement* in the room.’ The Danielson folks were emphatic. ‘There was *excitement* in the room?’ I don’t care about that. You’re not putting that in an observation. You may put, ‘Four students laughed out loud after the teacher delivered a line’ or ‘Students jumped out of their seat, *literally*, jumped out of their seat in anticipation of the next question and shot their hands up in the air.’ They were emphatic.

He noted the lack of metaphorical language to describe teaching practice, invoking the voices of Danielson Group training personnel, who he described as “emphatic,” amplifying the force of his statement through repetition. He represented the Danielson Group as using a forceful second-person position (you) and suggested that they “d[id]n’t care” about those aspects of the classroom that may have been amplified in a teacher evaluation through metaphorical language to express tone. Ironically, however, he went on to explain this process through a metaphor of his own: “Your text is the classroom. Boom. There it is. Where do you see it and what do you see?” The classroom was a text, which needed to be read and interpreted by its reader, the evaluator conducting the teacher evaluation using the FFT.

His selection of materials also demonstrated his propensity for art, metaphor, and the human element of teaching. One of the documents, he explained, was distributed to

his staff before they left for Thanksgiving holiday break. The document was put in each teacher's mailbox. "The Danielson Guide to a Highly Effective Thanksgiving" (2015) was a satirical piece on the FFT with examples of what four different Thanksgiving meals would look like as evaluated by the Danielson Group's model. In terms of genre, it was a humorous satire, suggesting that the principal stylistically valued and positively appraised creativity, aligning with and confirming his positive appraisals for the "human element" in teaching and his allusions to the importance of fostering creativity in educational contexts.

Although he was unsure of the author of the original document, the language was resonant with his enactment of the greater discourse as he remembered it from his Danielson Group training. For example, under the description for "Needs Improvement," the document read, "3 children are laughing while you say grace. 4 of your nephews refuse to watch the game with the rest of your family because you have failed to offer differentiated game choices" ("Danielson Guide," 2015). The sentences were constructed as matter-of-fact, objective statements with little appraisal graduation through metaphors, very similar to the ones that Joseph used during the interview when invoking the Danielson Group training personnel. Interestingly, however, the construction of the subjective second-person (you) statements throughout the piece also suggested that both reader and distributor of the document (in this case, Joseph) acknowledged that a teacher may have felt that the FFT personally judged him or her rather than offering a way to appraise the value of his or her work objectively through appreciation.

**“Making it work”: Moving beyond the box.** Joseph’s greatest concern in terms of exercising his social agency as a principal using the Danielson FFT was how to reconcile the problem of evaluating a teacher’s work that he both believed to be exceptional but also did not necessarily “match [a] box” or “follow Danielson.” He explained:

I make it work ... Okay, that’s the tool, but how do I get the observation as I think it fairly should be done for a teacher, *to* the teacher? .... We have had conversations as an administrative team building level – ‘I just saw an amazing lesson. It doesn’t really fit Danielson. I’m going to find a way to make it fit so the person’s rewarded accordingly because there’s no question I walked out of that room and that was an amazing lesson.’

He expressed concerns about the teacher as a person, evident in his recognition that the teacher evaluation process was something “done for a teacher,” even qualifying his statement by changing the preposition in his rephrasing “*to* the teacher,” an appraisal that emphasized judgment of the person over objective observations of his or her work.

Through invoking the heteroglossic voices of other principals, he suggested that he was not alone in a desire to “make it work,” bolstering the force his statement. He did not feel as though agency was necessarily limited or expanded by the Danielson FFT, but rather he did feel the need to modify his practices in order to reconcile the “human element” with a tool that focused on appreciation of a person’s work, devoid of the metaphor or feelings associated with it.

Joseph explained that he believed the intended use of the FFT tool was really to get to the “conversation,” something which he appraised as having significantly more value than the tool itself:

If we speak purely about her [Danielson’s] tool, it’s absent of conversation. Now, she [Danielson] would say, I think, based on the training that I’ve had, ‘There should be massive amounts of conversation that proceed the observation. The checkboxes are there. It’s collaborative before the final document is written.’ And so, what’s written is really just a very tiny snapshot of the overall conversation that went on and maybe took, in total, 2 hours between supervisor and teacher.

While the tool was personified here and negatively appraised as being “absent of conversation,” he demonstrated that the “massive amounts” of conversation helped to qualify his appraisal of its use through amplification. This was presented as a direct contrast to a classroom observation using the FFT, which was amplified through the phrasing “just a very tiny snapshot.” He also invoked the heteroglossic voice of Charlotte Danielson herself, the ostensible origin of the model, in explaining how he believed she would say it was a misuse of the FFT if the process did not include conversation.

However, he then qualified this statement to explain the realities of its use in practice: “Is that happening? My experience is, no. In individual cases, yes, but it takes a *true* clinical observation and it takes – within that – skills, you know, *orators* to have that conversation.” He emphasized the rarity of this occurring, amplifying the focus (a “true clinical” observation) and also noted that one must be a skilled “orator,” an additional amplification and reflection stylistically of his positive appreciation for language skills among principals and supervisors, who were conducting evaluations of teachers.

He also expressed concerns over whether evaluators were able to see beyond the rubric's boxes: "Can you read the art? ... Any leader and any boss in any context could be missing a dynamite employee who's doing great things because they don't get it." Even though Joseph believed strongly in the value of conversation, he did not believe that it was always occurring in practice. It was up to the observer to be able to recognize and be able to metaphorically "read the art," which he appraised to be absent from the language in the FFT. This, too, was reflected in the documents he decided to share with me. He shared photocopies of pages from the FFT, which he had distributed to his staff at a faculty meeting. His notes, some of which crossed out or circled words in the FFT's rubric boxes, demonstrated his thinking when observing a teacher's lesson. Recognizing "the art" sometimes meant moving beyond the language contained within the boxes. Joseph believed that it was ultimately up to the evaluator to "read the art," and it was his or her obligation to be critical of what was on the page.

**The critical conversation: The positive, unintended "spiraling effect."** While Joseph explained that conversations were not occurring as they should have been, he did believe that there was an overall conversational benefit to the change process, yet one that was never actually intended. He believed that it was unfortunate that the FFT "gives weak leaders a crutch to be able to say, 'Let's have a discussion because it's in the tool and we have to discuss it.''" The value of the conversation, he explained, was actually not the one that resulted *from* the tool, but one that arose *because* of teachers' challenges to it:

They're [teachers] coming up with questions or challenging the tool or saying, 'Wow, this rubric really is not fair to me as a teacher.' And then, they're starting

to say, ‘Wait a second now – *my* rubric that I’ve been asked to make for my essay writing or my lab scores or whatever ... How is *that* not fair to my kids?’ And so, there’s kind of a spiraling effect that I don’t think was intended, but gets a discussion [started], a professional discussion ... On some level, this gives a pedagogical discussion, one that I think is *completely* in higher education. And I think, in many ways, the [TeachNJ] law, which Danielson becomes kind of an integral part of, forces the discussion that probably should have [already] happened.

Here, Joseph described the enactment of discourse, one that, because of push back against the tool itself, has become a critical one in more than one sense of the term; it was crucial, analytical, and inward looking. He invoked the heteroglossic voices of teachers, who were “challenging” the tool, something which he positively appraised and valued highly, explaining that it was a “professional” and “pedagogical” discussion that “should have happened” in the past. Danielson and the FFT were indelibly linked to the new laws guiding teacher evaluations, suggesting that the origins of the change were dialectical. He alluded to higher education, which implicitly lent those conversations value based on their association with academia. It represented a positive appraisal through its association. In some way, the tool (“this”) had pushed the conversations to a more scholarly level, examining structures from a more distant perspective rather than simply as existing within them.

When asked what strengths, if any, did he find with the adoption of the FFT, he qualified his statements, noting, “Yes, we’ve started a pedagogical conversation about questioning, about engagement, about ownership, about classroom environment. Maybe

we've inched the ball forward. But it's certainly not revolutionary with respect to changing classrooms. It's starting a discussion." Using a metaphor to describe the change process, he decreased the force of his prior assessment, noting it had simply "inched the ball forward." However, consistent with his stylistic framing of his identity and with his strong positive appraisal for both the value of conversation and challenges to the norm, he believed the strongest aspect of the FFT was the one that was not inherent to the tool itself, but beyond it.

**Being "authentic" in implementing change: The principal's role.** Joseph's appraisals of the FFT and its use wavered between positive and negative, and he described the change as a challenge, ultimately coming down to a "question of whether you have to be authentic to the tool or authentic to what you're credentialed and licensed to do." He believed that a principal's agency was not necessarily limited by the TeachNJ Act and the FFT, but rather it changed as more demands were placed on him or her through the new law's guidelines. He referenced other principals in his district who "were concerned with the workload, but that was part of AchieveNJ. There were just *so many* observations and whatever else, and the tool was massively long." Administrators were seeing increased demands on their time in terms of the law and the FFT, appraisals of which Joseph amplified in his statement ("so many observations" with a "massively long" tool). This was a change that was more work for both principals and for teachers. He explained that the change was one to which he needed to be sensitive in terms of how he presented it to his teaching staff:

You know, I mean, this was a *big* change. And it needed to be treated as such. At the same time, you need to allay folks' fears by making it seem not *as* large by

piecing it out and giving people time to digest it and not hammering them [teachers] over the head with the first observation and say, 'It's a new tool! Wake up!' That was important because, when all's said and done, it goes back to ... the supervisor and the teacher having a more of kindred spirit relationship and a productive relationship.

Joseph understood and positively appraised the value of "relationships," even rephrasing and repeating the term to amplify its value. Through his heteroglossic invocation of how a principal might have presented the change, he demonstrated that he valued sensitivity and empathy toward his teachers over a hardline approach of metaphorically "hammering them over the head" because they needed to "wake up."

Joseph further warned that approaching the change process harshly could lead to grave consequences:

This had a huge propensity to further an us-versus-them dynamic in district, in a building, in a class, within a classroom, and in an observation. And that is a pretty perilous circumstance. It could lead to some pretty bad things. So I think there was an element of really ensuring, 'Hey, we're all in this together. We're going to learn this together. It's going to be imperfect. Let's just expect that this is going to be a 2-year, 3-year process 'til we really get this humming along.'

While Joseph positively appraised the critical conversation and "spiraling effect" that unintentionally resulted from the adoption of the FFT, he also suggested that it was up to the principal to create an environment that fostered healthy criticism rather than an environment defined by "us-versus-them," offering a firm negative appraisal of this dynamic through his use of the word "perilous" here. His top priorities and values were to



keep this from happening, and both his use of the first-person plural (“we”) in addition to acknowledging the potential difficulties of the change process increased his positive appraisal of relationships with staff through this contrast. In closing, he explained that even though the FFT was “not perfect” and “even with its holes, even with a lack of recognition of the conversation that should go on or whatever else, it’s still better” than his district’s previous use of the “binary system.” For Joseph, the critical conversations that needed to happen would happen as long as he was able to explain the importance of “reading art” when using a standardized method, model critical analysis of the FFT’s language in application to practice, and to, most importantly, maintain positive, close relationships with his staff throughout the discursive change process.

### **Discussion and Implications**

**The principal as social agent.** Joseph did not believe that his social agency was expanded or limited by his district’s adoption of the FFT; however, the ways in which he appraised the FFT and greater changes to teacher evaluations did reflect his role as a social agent in the process. One of his priorities was to mediate between central office and his staff, acknowledging that the changes were “big” but also reassuring them that they were “in this together.” The idea that the principal plays an integral role in mediating change was certainly resonant with the literature (Ingle et al., 2011; Koyama, 2014; Louis & Robinson, 2012; Spillane et al., 2002; Spillane & Kenney, 2012; Spillane et al., 2011). Louis and Robinson (2012) note, “How educators understand a given policy will depend on the constructs, schema, values, and emotional reactions they bring to the policy content” (p. 631). This was certainly the case for Joseph, whose appraisals and selected materials reflected both his values and his prior experiences. His appraisals of these

experiences also aligned with Rutledge et al.'s (2010) findings in their study, which focused on administrative responses to requirements for NCLB. They found that “district administrators and principals negotiated multiple messages and policies, each selecting a unique combination that resonated with their individual conceptions of quality and local goals” (Rutledge et al., 2010, p. 235), a finding that was also resonant with Fairclough's (2010) explanation of how people respond to the greater technologisation process so that they may understand new discursive practices in light of their current beliefs.

Additionally, Joseph appraised aspects of the FFT negatively because he felt that it eliminated some of the metaphorical nuances of teaching. This, too, was also consistent with the literature on teacher evaluation systems more generally. Larsen (2005), who examined teacher evaluation policies from around the world, suggested that “performance appraisal systems rely upon lists of competency statements ... that provide concrete examples of observable behaviours characteristic of that competency,” further describing them as “measure[ing] decontextualised skills and knowledge rather than holistic, contextualized understandings and teaching practices” (p. 298). Similarly, Joseph had this concern, and it was the reason for feeling the need to “make it work” in light of these circumstances. He exerted his social agency through compromise between his personal positive appraisal of the art of teaching and metaphor with his negative appraisal for the rigidity that he felt characterized some of the FFT's language.

Interestingly, his sentiments also spoke to Cochran-Smith's (2005) findings on teacher education reform initiatives where the power of the metaphor could not be discounted: “the metaphor is the message – that is, the powerful metaphors and images ... convey equally powerful messages about the nature of society and the possibilities and

limitations of particular directions for improving the quality of the nation's teachers (pp. 182-183). Limitations and expansions of social agency were dictated and shaped by changes in the discourse, the metaphorical and symbolic components of which proved to be strongly influential in defining the very parameters of what it meant to be social agent in the change process.

**Technologisation and the origins of change.** Joseph noted one of the greatest challenges that he faced in using the FFT was rectifying his value for the “human element” of teaching with the purported objectivity and metaphor-free “boxes” of the FFT’s rubric. He explained that the changes emanated from the outside, consistent with the elements of a technologisation of the discourse, the Danielson Group, in his view, became an “integral part of” the TeachNJ Act. His enactment of the discourse in explaining his search for being “authentic” was resonant with the last element of the technologisation of discourse, where in response to this change process, one “may arrive at all sorts of accommodations and compromises between existing practices and new techniques” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 141). This, Fairclough (2010) further describes as “the most common and certainly the most interesting case” because it may provide insights into “ongoing processes of change in social relations and social identities” (p. 141). For Joseph, his prior experiences as a teacher and his interest in language and the arts certainly informed the way in which he described and made meaning of the discursive changes to teacher evaluations.

Joseph’s enactment of the discourse, greater understanding of the change process, and value for thinking beyond the “box” were resonant with researchers, who found that objective measures for evaluating teacher quality were not sufficient to capture the

“complexity of human resource functions in education” (Ingle et al., 2011, p. 603). The documents that he selected and his values reflected his enactment of the discursive changes, a process that has been found in the literature to be highly individualized and complex (Koyama, 2014; Rutledge et al., 2010; Spillane et al., 2002). Interestingly, however, Joseph understood that there were positive, unintended consequences to the change process, a narrative that read very much counter to that described by Giroux (2010), who likened neoliberal reform movements, arguably like those resulting from a technologisation of discourse, to a metaphorical battlefield, where the public sector was “under attack” with teachers becoming a “casualty” in a process that sought to “dumb down” the profession (pp. 347, 348, 365). For Giroux (2010), these broader changes threatened to stifle the critical conversation. For Joseph, however, the battlefield had emerged *because* of these changes, compelling and promoting a healthy dialogue and debate where there previously was no reason for one.

**Implications for practice and policy.** This study has implications for both practice and policy. For practice, this study’s findings suggest that there may be a need for practitioners, including administrators and teachers, to focus on the conversational space created by these reforms rather than simply understanding them as limiting a discursive space. This speaks to the very meaning and value of CDA research in general. In explaining the “critical” nature of CDA, Fairclough (2010) notes that critiques examine “what exists, what might exist and what should exist on the basis of a coherent set of values ... this is a matter of highlighting the gaps between what particular societies claim to be ... and what they are” (p. 7). That this, the results of this study have highlighted a “gap” and suggest that there can be a divergence between theory and

practice, creating a space for critical conversation. The discursive changes resulting from the use of the Danielson FFT may have very well opened up the potential for this conversation, where principals may involve stakeholders, at all levels of their organizations, in an examination of the discursive changes that have occurred in light of teacher evaluation reforms more generally. In addition, the technologisation of discourse spawns highly individualized responses. This study's findings can hopefully provide principals with the impetus to reflect on their own discursive choices and social agency by exploring the relationship between their values, personal beliefs, and appraisals of the change process collectively. For policy, the study's findings suggest the need to critically examine the frameworks that have been guiding teacher evaluation policies and procedures and to be sure that creativity and thinking beyond the "box" is encouraged. Additionally, it is crucial that policymakers acknowledge that principals play a pivotal role in influencing the discourse dialectically through their understandings and appraisals of them.

## **Conclusion**

While Joseph certainly wavered in his appraisal of his district's adoption of the FFT and suggested his desire to be "authentic" when faced with a tool that seemed to diverge from his personal values and beliefs, his overall enactment of the discursive changes were positive because of the resulting critical conversation, an appraisal of which he valued as a top priority. This study demonstrated that a principal's enactment of the discourse was dialectically related to both his role as a social agent in the change and his appraisals of the process as a whole, which has implications for future research in both policy and practice. This study's findings suggested that more research may need to

be done to further explore policy documents associated with the TeachNJ Act and examine their origins with their authors, who also functioned as social agents in the greater change process through the enactment of the new mandates. Finally, there is certainly a need for more research with regard to practice on how other stakeholders function as social agents in the change process at a more local level, particularly with central office personnel and Board of Education members, who may have played a pivotal role in selecting their district's teacher evaluation model to comply with the new laws.

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## Appendix A

### Informed Consent Form

I agree to participate in a research study preliminarily entitled “Strategies for Change in New Jersey’s Teacher Evaluations: How Principals Make Meaning of the Danielson Framework for Teaching,” which is being conducted by Ms. Sara Van Ness, doctoral candidate at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey. This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Ane Johnson in partial fulfillment of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Education. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how principals make meaning of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. This research seeks to analyze the principal’s role in the greater discourse surrounding teacher evaluation reform in addition to examining how the principals’ critical sensemaking exist in a liminal space between the texts produced outside of the school and district context (i.e., the Danielson FFT) and those that are used by principals within their schools. The data from this study will be analyzed in comparison of data from previous studies, will be submitted as a doctoral study.

I understand that I will be asked to engage in two 30-minute interviews. My signature below indicates that I agree to participate. Data collected in this study may be used to enhance, redesign or develop professional development opportunities for principals with regard to teacher evaluation. I understand that my responses and data gathered will be confidential. I agree that any information obtained from this study may be used in any way thought best for publication and/or education provided that I am in no way identified and my name is not used.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant’s Initials

I understand that I will not be affected unfavorably or favorably by opting or not opting to participate in the research. Participation in the study is voluntary and can be stopped anytime without any consequences. Participation does not imply that any person will be placed in a position of advantage or disadvantage with his or her employer, the principal investigator, or any others associated with the study.

I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study, and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty. If I have any questions or problems concerning my participation in this study, I may contact the principal investigator, Ms. Sara Van Ness or I may contact Dr. Ane Johnson at (856) 256-4500 ext. 3818. I recognize that my time and consideration are greatly appreciated.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Investigator)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)



## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Protocol**

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. Today, we will be discussing your perspective on the Danielson Framework for Teaching and your role in implementing the new requirements for teacher evaluations within your school. I would like to remind you at this time that your responses to interview questions and the data gathered during the study will remain confidential. Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and greatly appreciated. You may stop at any time without consequence, and your participation does not imply that you will be placed in a position of advantage or disadvantage with your employer, the principal investigator, or any others associated with the study.

#### **Retrospective Examination of Prior Experiences**

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. How long have you worked at your school and in what role(s)?
2. What differences do you see between teacher evaluations today and those of the past?
3. How have your past experiences with teacher evaluation informed your current work in implementing the Danielson Framework?

#### **Social Agency and Teacher Evaluations**

4. What are your responsibilities in terms of managing teacher evaluations for your school?
5. How do you mediate between the needs of teachers within your school and the requirements handed down from central office or the state?
6. How (if at all) do you see your agency limited by the new teacher evaluations?
  - a) Within your district?
  - b) Within the bounds of state and federal regulations?
  - c) Within the Danielson Framework for Teaching?
7. How (if at all) do you see your agency expanded by the new teacher evaluations?
  - a) Within your district?
  - b) Within the bounds of state and federal regulations?
  - c) Within the Danielson Framework for Teaching?

### **Strategies for Change**

8. Tell me a little bit about the change process that your school had to undergo in response to the new teacher evaluation system.
9. How would you describe the goal of these changes that have been made by the state?
10. How were the needed changes conveyed to you by your district?
11. Describe your role in implementing the necessary changes.
12. What strategies did you need to use in order to mediate between the state or district's requirements and your school community?
13. How did you convey the needed changes to staff?
14. What resistance (if any) did you face when implementing the new changes?

## **Appendix C**

### **Archive Material Protocol**

1. Describe the contents of the document or material. What is the subject?

#### **Social Agency and Teacher Evaluations**

2. For whom is the document or material intended? Who is the intended audience?
3. Who is the creator of the document or material?
4. How (if at all) does the document or material suggest limitations on the principal's agency?
5. How (if at all) does the document or material suggest an expansion of the principal's agency?

#### **Strategies for Change**

6. What strategy or strategies for change does the document or material describe?
7. What is the purpose of the document or material? What is its function?
8. How is the document or material's message conveyed? What is the genre or medium?
9. Describe the role the document or material plays in conveying one or more strategies for change.
10. Describe the tone of the document or material in conveying its message.

## **Appendix D**

### **Researcher Journal Protocol**

#### **Exploring the Discourse Practice: The Intermediate Dimension of Discourse**

1. Describe any prominent mannerisms or gestures that the participant demonstrated during the interview.
2. Describe the acquisitions process for the documents at the school.
3. Describe any silences or gaps that were apparent during the interviews.
4. Describe any silences or gaps that are missing among the archival materials.
5. Describe any connections or comparisons across and between the interviews and archival materials.

#### **Exploring Sociocultural Practice: The Larger Dimension of Discourse**

6. What are my reflections on the immediate sociocultural practice or “situation” or strategies for change being implemented in the participant’s school and district?
7. What are my reflections on the “institutional” sociocultural practice, the principal’s function as a “social agent” in promoting the strategies for change to teacher evaluations?
8. What are my reflections on the larger “societal” sociocultural context with regard to the origins for these strategies for change to teacher evaluation reform?
9. What are my reflections on my role as a researcher in terms of situational, institutional, and societal sociocultural practice?